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ANASTASIYA PROKOPENKO (BLR) RECEIVES BEIJING 2008 OLYMPIC BRONZE MEDAL



The new world champion, Anastasiya Prokopenko of Belarus, was back on the podium on the final evening of the UIPM 2018 Pentathlon World Championships – for a very special reason.

Ten years ago, aged, 22, the pentathlete from Slutsk finished 4th at her first Olympic Games, in 2008 in Beijing. Two more Olympics passed without Prokopenko being able to scale that podium.

During that time she started a family with her husband, Mikhail, but she never stopped dreaming of that elusive Olympic medal. It seemed inevitable that Tokyo 2020 would be her last chance – she will be 35 when the next Games come around – but then there was a twist of fate.

In 2017, it emerged that Viktoriya Tereshchuk of Ukraine, the bronze medallist from Beijing, had tested positive for a banned substance at the 2008 Games. Thanks to advances in retrospective testing, it was confirmed that an anti-doping violation had occurred and Tereshchuk (UKR) was disqualified and ordered to return her medal, diploma and pin.

Such incidents have been rare in Modern Pentathlon but across the Olympic sporting movement many results have been adjusted due to a historic transgression, and each time there is a process to be followed in giving the deserving medallist due recognition.

So it transpired that the International Olympic Committee arranged for the rightful owner of that bronze medal to receive it after the conclusion of the 2018 World Championships, making a successful event even more joyous for the 32-year-old mother of two.

"I was waiting a long time for this medal, it is very close to my heart and I think that this will help me to get a good result in the next Olympic Games in Tokyo in 2020," said Prokopenko (BLR) after receiving her Olympic bronze from Dr Klaus Schormann, UIPM President, and Joel Bouzou, UIPM Vice-President and President of the World Olympians Association.

"My dream is to be on the podium in 2020, to win a medal in the centre of the Pentathlon Stadium, and this really increases my motivation during this Olympic cycle.

"I respect all the rules of clean sport and it's very important that everybody plays under the same conditions, without any doping. I never had a problem with doping. I hope it's a very good example for young athletes."

Prokopenko (BLR) has been a fierce competitor throughout her career and has won a variety of medals. In 2017 she won European gold and then bronze at the World Championships. This time, she finally became world champion after many years of trying, and she also won gold in the Women's Relay for Belarus alongside Iryna Prasiantsova.

Pentathlon has many role models but the way Prokopenko has been able to balance family life while remaining at the top of her sport, even progressing and improving with each passing year, sets a glowing example.

"For me, family life and sport life work together. I have one son and one daughter, I always call them and they push me to be better and better. And sometimes I feel that I compete for them," said Prokopenko, who was visibly emotional at the end of the Women's Individual Final.

"In my heart, I dreamed about this medal but until I crossed the line, I didn't believe it could be a gold medal and it was a very exciting race.

"I am very happy. Mexico City is my happy town now, and it will be an honour to keep this medal in my house."

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UIPM President Schormann commented: "It was a great pleasure for myself and Joel Bouzou, on behalf of the IOC, to present the Summer Olympic Games 2008 bronze medal for Modern Pentathlon to Anastasiya Prokopenko.

"She has been a model athlete for many years, competing at a high level as we saw on Wednesday when she won the gold medal for women at the UIPM Pentathlon World Championships. Her victory was a great highlight of a very exciting competition, staged for the first in a Pentathlon Stadium where all five disciplines took place in one venue.

"For Anastasiya to receive the Olympic Games bronze medal that she deserves, even after 10 years, sends a clear message to young athletes and we are grateful to the IOC for facilitating this presentation.

"Throughout the global UIPM sporting movement we are unequivocal in our promotion of clean sport and our support for clean athletes."