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UIPM 2019 PENTATHLON WORLD CUP SZEKESFEHERVAR: ZILLEKENS (GER) WINS CLASSIC BATTLE

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- Former youth world champion snares first Pentathlon World Cup medal
- Silver takes Prades (FRA) to No.1 in world rankings but slip proves costly
- Teen idol Elgendy (EGY) hangs on to bronze after tiring on last lap

It was billed as a clash of the titans between 15 of the world's 16 top-ranked pentathletes, but ultimately it came down to a private battle between three.

But what a battle.

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Christian Zillekens of **Germany** emerged as a triumphant gold medallist at UIPM 2019 Pentathlon World Cup Szekesfehervar, winning by 3sec from **Valentin Prades** of **France**.

It is rare that two medallists in a pentathlon competition end up feeling disappointed with the result, but that was the outcome for both Prades (FRA), who fell during the Laser Run and lost crucial momentum, and for bronze medallist **Ahmed Elgendy** of **Egypt**, who took the lead on the final lap before fading.

The high level of performances was underlined by the calibre of the athletes left behind by the medallists. They were joined on the podium by **Great Britain** duo **Jamie Cooke** (4th) and **Joseph Choong** (5th), and **Jan Kuf** of the **Czech Republic**, who was 6th.

For 23-year-old Zillekens (GER), the taste of gold was especially sweet as this was his first Pentathlon World Cup medal, underlining the consistency he had shown with four top-10 finishes since 2016, culminating in a 4th place at Pentathlon World Cup Sofia last month.

MEDALLISTS' REACTION

Zillekens (GER), who was a UIPM world youth champion in Wuhan (CHN) in 2013, said: "I cannot believe it. I started the Laser Run in 4th place and I would have been happy with this place in the end.

"I shot very well and then in the last 100 metres, my finish was good and I gave everything. I knew I could get it.

"I saw that Valentin was close behind us, and it was a hard finish, but in the end I had a better finishing speed.

"I hope to get a good place in Pentathlon World Cup Final Tokyo, I will try to do my best. We will see."

Silver gave Prades (FRA) enough ranking points to push him above **Jun Woongtae** of **Korea** (17th) into the world No.1 position, but the 2018 world silver medallist wasn't entirely happy with his day's work.

Prades (FRA) said: "It was a nice show, but I didn't shoot well today. It wasn't good enough for winning gold and that's the reason I am 2nd. Not a good Laser Run and I am not very happy.

"It's a high performance, and my running was good, but I am not at my top level and I also had a crash on the turn. Maybe that was the difference [between silver and gold], we will never know. But I am very happy for Christian.

"I'm preparing for the events in the summer and this one is very good physical preparation."

For 19-year-old Elgendy (EGY), it was another mark of star quality, coming on the back of his breakthrough gold medal at Pentathlon World Cup Cairo in February. Pentathlon's most exciting prospect won UIPM world gold at junior and youth level in 2018, as well as the Youth Olympic Games gold medal.

Elgendy (EGY) said: "It was a very good day today and I won 3rd position and I'm very happy.

"Actually I wasn't expecting this position because the last period was not good for me – a few injuries and ups and downs and not very good training.

"My Swimming was not very good but Fencing was good today – I finished in 7th position and 4th overall. But my Riding was the best since I started riding, and 300 points secured my place, I moved forward one place.

"There was a 3sec gap between me and Valentin Prades, and he was very strong in the run. I shot very well today but didn't run very well. The last lap wasn't good for me, there was no endurance in my running.

"I was up against two great athletes, and they were idols of mine when I was in the youth ranks and I'm happy to be competing with them. My next target is the Pentathlon World Cup Final Tokyo, where I hope to qualify for the Olympic Games. If not, then I hope to qualify at the Pentathlon World Championships in Budapest."

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SWIMMING

When the top two British athletes compete, there is always a private battle to break the two-minute barrier and today it was world champion Cooke (GBR) who made it – just – with a time of 1:59.96.

In the lane beside him, Choong (GBR) timed 2:00.17 and the next-fastest swimmer was **Gustav Gustenau** of **Austria**, who completed 200m in 2:01.81.

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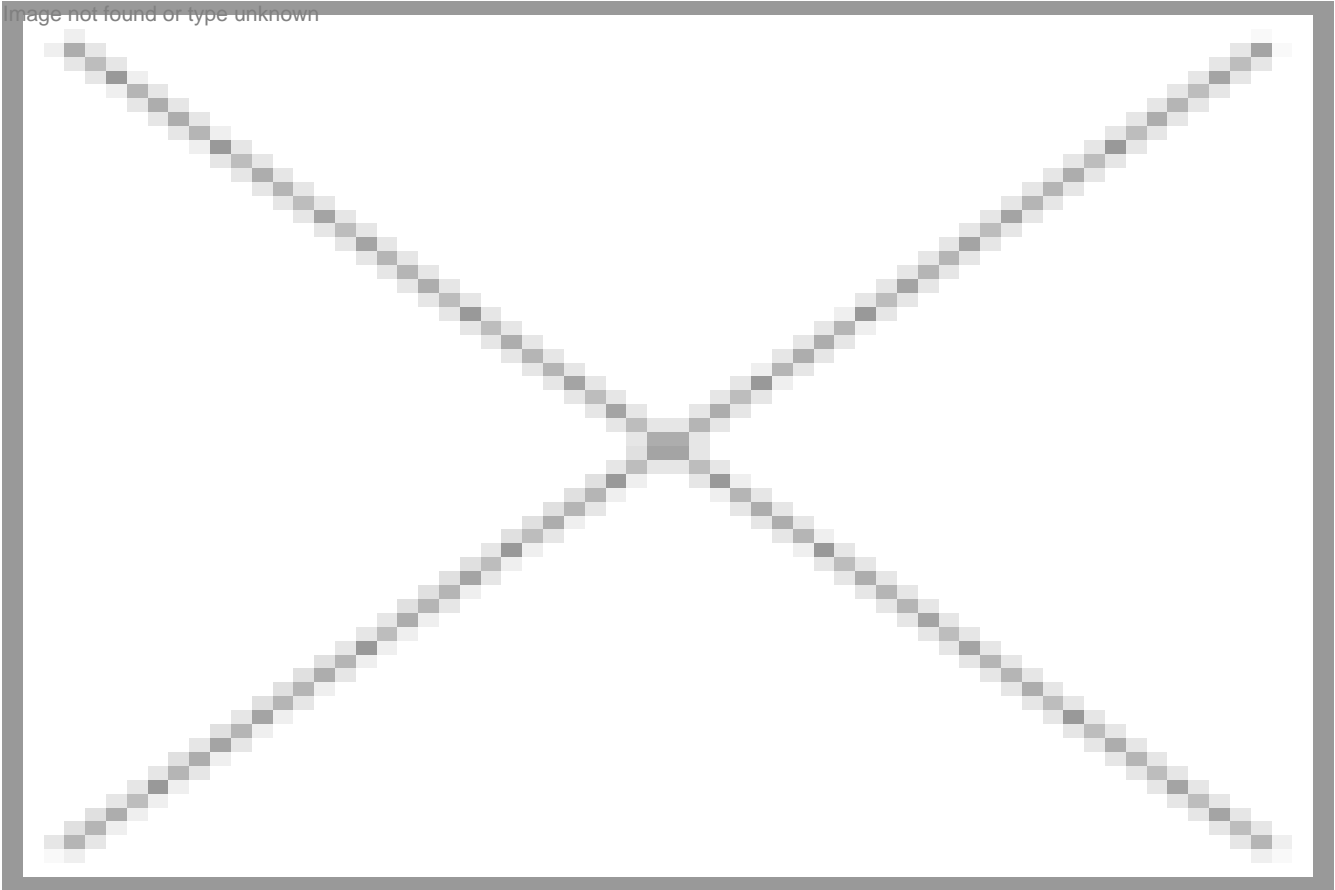
FENCING

In the Fencing hall, all eyes were on **Alexander Lesun** of **Russia** after his exceptional performance in qualification (26V/6D). But the Olympic champion found the competition to be much tougher in this high-class field.

At the end of a fiercely competitive Ranking Round it was Prades (FRA) who emerged triumphant, with 24V/11D. Lesun (RUS) joined four others – Zillekens (GER), Kuf (CZE), **Eslam Hamad** (EGY) and **Justinas Kinderis** of **Lithuania** – on 23V/12D, while Elgendy (EGY) stayed in contention with 21V/14D.

Unfortunately for the home crowd, there was to be no repeat of Tamara Alekszejev's golden performance 24 hours earlier as **Bence Demeter** of **Hungary** struggled on the piste, securing only nine victories (though he later managed seven in the Bonus Round).

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RIDING

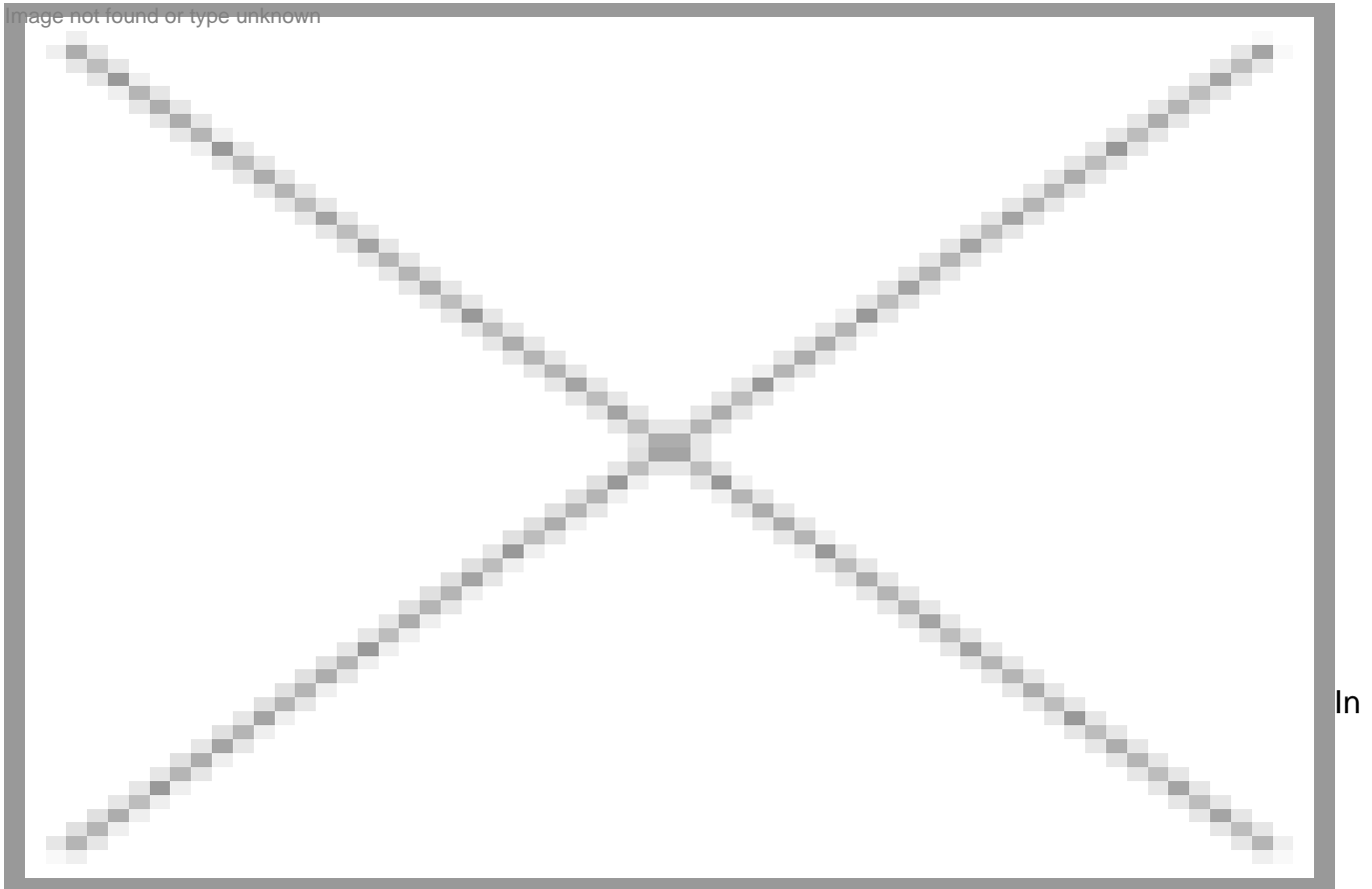
The standard of horsemanship was truly incredible, with 18 athletes coming within one error of a clear round.

There were clear rounds for Zillekens (GER), Elgendy (EGY) and Choong (GBR) as well as 2017 UIPM junior world champion **Daniele Colasanti** of **Italy**, **Kirill Belyakov** (RUS) and **Sebastian Stasiak** of **Poland**.

Prades (FRA) dropped just seven points to retain the overall lead, but there was mounting pressure all around him.

LASER RUN

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wet conditions, Prades (FRA) started just 2sec ahead of Kuf (CZE), 3sec ahead of Elgendy (EGY) and 6sec ahead of Zillekens (GER), and four became three at the first visit to the shooting range.

The three medallists performed with such consistent excellence that even the world champion, Cooke (GBR), was unable to make up a 9sec starting handicap.

It was Elgendy (EGY) who made the first move, overtaking Prades (FRA) during the second shoot, and the race became a little more complicated for the latter as he turned a tight corner on the second lap and lost his footing on the muddy grass, losing a couple of seconds.

He was never allowed to pull away, but Elgendy (EGY) continued to set the standard at the range, hitting five targets in just 6sec at the third visit.

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There was a strong suspicion that gold might be decided at the final shoot, and this time it was Zillekens (GER) was quickest on the draw, getting in and out in 9sec and staying on the shoulder of Elgendy (EGY).

With Prades (FRA) looking strong in the background, Zillekens (GER) broke clear of Elgendy (EGY) with 150m to go, and Prades (FRA) did the same as the teenager failed to respond. Zillekens (GER) kept watch over his shoulder but he had managed his Laser Run perfectly, and glory came the German's way as he powered across the line.

In the final analysis Zillekens (GER, 10:37.50) was second only to **Luo Shuai** of **China** (10:36.72) in Laser Run pace, as **Patrick Dogue** (GER) timed 10:43.66 to salvage 10th place overall.

UIPM REACTION

Martin Dawe, UIPM Executive Board Member for Marketing, said: "It has been another fantastic day with the Men's Final. From the beginning it was a great event, with 100 men taking part in qualification and whittled down to 36 for the final.

"All day the competition was very close. Even going into the last discipline, the Laser Run, there were probably 10 athletes who could have won it. The standard has been so high it's incredible. It just shows that we are getting closer to the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games and people are upping their game in an effort to qualify.

"Again, the organisers have put on an excellent show, a well organised event with fantastic presentation. Another thing that has been good to see has been the improvement in the level of Riding. Here in Hungary, as always, they have provided some very good horses but this was complemented by some very good Riding, with a number of clear rounds."

WATCH AND FOLLOW

Pentathlon World Cup Szekesfehervar concludes tomorrow (May 5) with the Mixed Relay. Live stream is available on UIPM TV and up-to-date results will be available at the UIPM website.

