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UIPM PENTATHLON WORLD CUP FINAL TOKYO: CHOONG (GBR) WINS CLASSIC BATTLE TO BOOK OLYMPIC TICKET

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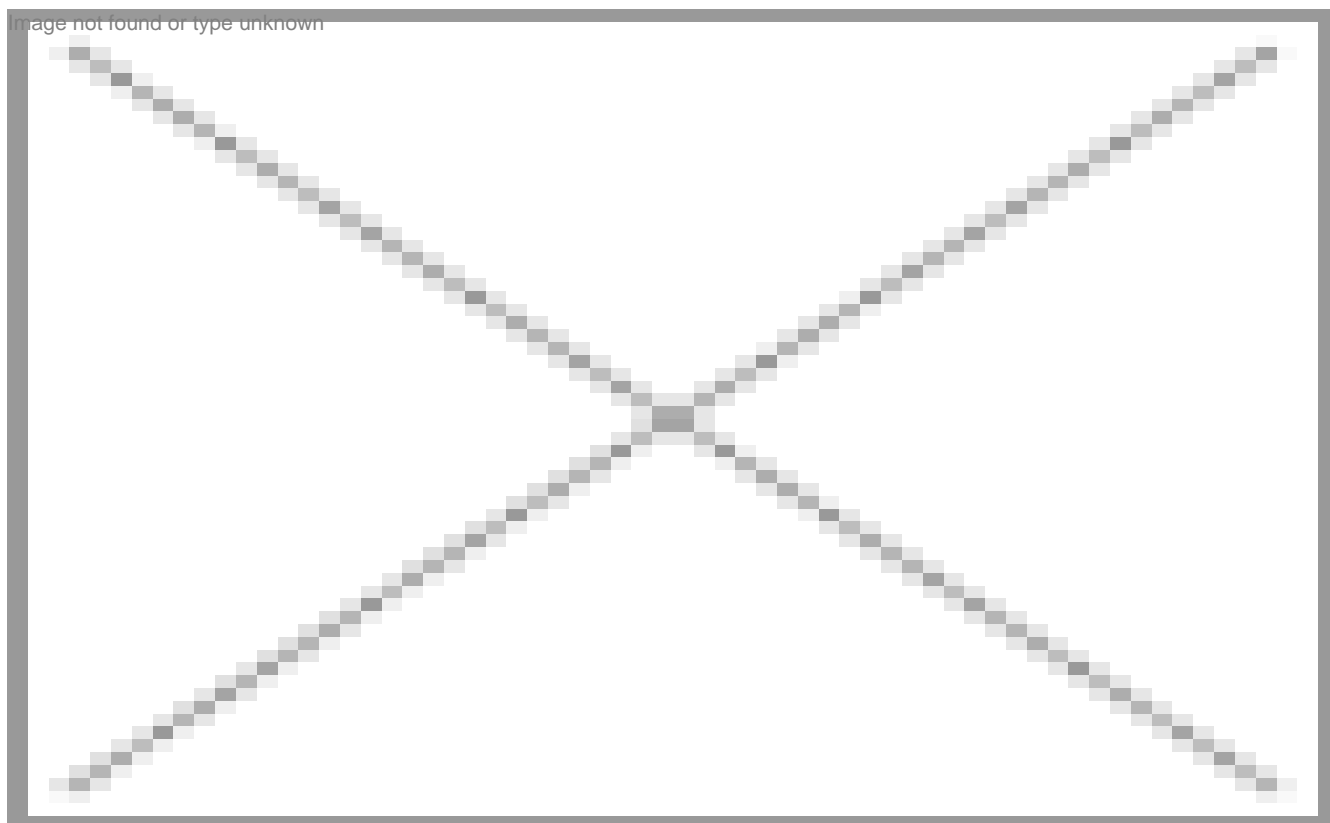
Joseph Choong of Great Britain shook off the bridesmaid's tag to earn a dramatic gold medal at the UIPM 2019 Pentathlon World Cup Final and earn a return trip to Tokyo next year.

After two silver medals during the regular season in Sofia (BUL) and Prague (CZE), Choong (GBR) was always going to be a strong contender for the sole qualification place at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, but he twice had to come from behind to claim the prize.

A day after the women's gold medal went to 35-year-old Laura Asadauskaite of Lithuania, it looked like experience would again be decisive as Alexander Lesun of Russia led the way through the disciplines. But Lesun (RUS), who turns 31 on Monday, came unstuck at the third shooting during the Laser Run.

Even then, Choong (GBR) had more work to do as Marvin Dogue of Germany snatched the lead at the start of the final 800m lap. A classic duel ensued, and Choong (GBR) had just too much energy for Dogue (GER) in a reprisal of the dramatic battle for silver between the two athletes in

Prague (CZE).



The

result was a young-looking podium, led by 24-year-old Choong and 23-year-old Dogue and completed by 22-year-old Li Shuhuan of China. The bronze medallist rose 15 places with an astonishing Laser Run performance to claim his first medal at a senior UIPM competition.

A batch of big names crossed the line behind them, lead by world No.1 Valentin Prades of France and Pavlo Tymoshchenko of Ukraine and Patrick Dogue (GER), elder brother of Marvin. Lesun (RUS) finished 7th, one place ahead of Justinas Kinderis (LTU).

Hikaru Shimano of Japan was the highest finisher for the host nation of this official Tokyo 2020 Olympic test event in a creditable 18th.

MEDALLISTS' REACTION

Choong (GBR) said after the breathless finale: "It feels amazing. In the early stages I just wanted to stay in contention, knowing that when it came to the last lap I would back myself as I have done all season.

"Two of my shoots weren't great and created a bit of pressure on me but a few others didn't manage to hold their nerve either, and luckily when it came to the last lap I was still up there.

"Lesun has been world champion and Olympic champion and everything in between, so it's always nice to try and get one up on him from time to time.

"As we came into the last two laps, I knew the Chinese athlete wasn't far behind, but I felt that even if he overtook me I would overtake him on the last lap.

"I think I had eight or nine shots in the final shoot and my average this season has been 5.2, so I was actually quite disappointed, but it all came good in the end.

"I actually feel a bit sorry for Marvin because I did the same thing to him in Prague. But it feels so good to have the Olympic place. I'd like to thank UK Sport and my parents for their support over the years. They've been fantastic."

A silver medal at a Pentathlon World Cup Final will be a strong source of consolation in time for Dogue (GER) but he was disappointed to be caught for the second consecutive race by the same athlete on that final lap.

Dogue (GER): "I started very slowly with very bad shooting but I didn't feel under much pressure because I thought everyone in front of me was good. But then I saw that some of them were starting to struggle on the shooting range, maybe because of the weather.

"I was catching up and tried to push myself and focus on myself and I realised I had nothing to lose. I knew Joe was fast from the last World Cup when he beat me in the same situation. This time I started to push myself but he had more than me again.

"I tried my best to push myself as hard as I can but I will have to keep working on my sprints, because this shouldn't happen again."

The big surprise of the day was the surge of Li (CHN), ending a long wait for his country to claim a major individual medal.

Li (CHN) said: "I am a very young athlete and this is my first time at the World Cup Final, and I am very happy [to have won a medal]. Thanks to all the coaches and the other members of the Chinese team.

"Today the competition was very good, very nice. I will keep racing and training and I hope to be here for the 2020 Olympic Games, which will be very good."

SWIMMING

Typically, the British duo of Choong and world champion Jamie Cooke set the pace in the pool, with Cooke (GBR) edging out Choong (GBR) 1:57.59 to 1:58.14. Gustav Gustenau of Austria also broke the 2min mark by 0.07sec.

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FENCING

After a victory at Pentathlon World Cup Prague that was built on a strong Fencing foundation, Rio 2016 Olympic champion Lesun (RUS) maintained his exceptional form on the piste with a dominant performance.

Lesun (RUS) scored 26V/9D in the Ranking Round and added the maximum two points in the Bonus Round. Behind him, Rio 2016 silver medallist Tymoshchenko (UKR) managed 23V/12D along with Patrick Dogue (GER) and Ivan Khamtsou of Belarus.

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RIDING

With rain falling and one or two horses proving tricky to manage, the Riding event was fraught with tension but five athletes managed a clean round, including Shimano (JPN), and another four came within two points of the maximum score of 300.

Marvin Dogue (GER, 298), Partick Dogue (GER, 293), Prades (FRA, 293) and Jung Jinhwa of Korea kept themselves firmly in contention, leaving the top two athletes to walk a tightrope.

Choong (GBR) looked to have mastered the challenge only to dislodge the last two obstacles to incur 14 penalty points. But the tension was even more pronounced for Lesun (RUS), riding a horse that had been difficult for others to manage on both competition days. But the supreme pentathlete of his generation summoned all his experience and Riding expertise to get round with only one blemish for a score of 293.

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LASER RUN

Lesun (RUS) started with a 15sec cushion over Choong (GBR), 23sec over Patrick Dogue (GER), 27sec over Prades (FRA) and 29sec over Marvin Dogue (GER), and for the first half of the Laser Run there was no hint of the drama to come.

However, it was the third visit to the shooting range, with rain falling increasingly heavily, where the leader came unstuck, taking numerous attempts to get his second shot away. Choong (GBR), who is renowned for his strong finish, seized the moment with an 8sec shoot.

Suddenly there was a whole new complexion to the race, with Li (CHN) right up there in contention for a medal of any colour. At the fourth shoot, it was anyone's game and it was Marvin Dogue (GER) who stormed out of the range to take pole position.

For anyone who had seen the climax in Prague, the result looked somewhat inevitable when Choong (GBR) exited the range only a few seconds behind his rival, with Lesun (RUS) now out of contention. Choong (GBR) duly hunted down Dogue (GER) and passed him around the halfway stage. Dogue (GER) kicked back in the final straight but the big prize of Olympic qualification proved elusive.

In the final analysis, Li (CHN) timed an impressive 10:44.10 but it wasn't even the fastest Laser Run of the day. That honour went to Martin Vlach of the Czech Republic, whose exceptional 10:37.10 earned him 12th place.

PRESIDENT'S REACTION

UIPM President Dr Klaus Schormann said: "We had an unbelievably exciting finish to the competition today. After the lead was held for a long time by Alexander Lesun, the places changed and changed and I think it was the best drama we had at the Pentathlon World Cup Final for many years.

"Again, in the conditions the organising committee have done extremely well to organise spectators and a very special atmosphere in all disciplines. The athletes like this and so do we.

"Respect to all our athletes today, they really showed that they never give up until the last moment. Everybody has a chance and it was a big surprise to see the Chinese athlete come from so far away to finish 3rd – this is a big moment for our Union and it's good to have Asia on the podium.

"Today couldn't be better, and tomorrow we are looking forward to an exciting Mixed Relay."

WATCH AND FOLLOW

The Pentathlon World Cup Final is being televised live or 'as live' in 143 countries, with a total of 90 hours of coverage secured by TV networks. This amounts to a total potential reach of 409 million.

UIPM 2019 Pentathlon World Cup Final Tokyo concludes tomorrow (June 30) with the Mixed Relay.

You can watch a live stream of the Fencing Bonus Round, Riding, Laser Run and the medal ceremony on UIPM TV and YouTube, with no geographical restrictions. The Laser Run and medal ceremony can also be watched live on Facebook.

Follow World Pentathlon on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram throughout the Pentathlon World Cup series for additional content, and visit the UIPM website or download the "UIPM Central" app to keep track of results.