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LASER RUN SPOTLIGHT: PLAYING A NUMBERS GAME ACROSS NORCECA

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The NORCECA Modern Pentathlon Confederation covers North America, Central America and the Caribbean – a vast region that is home to almost 600 million people with almost limitless potential for sports development.

As Laser Run is designed as a plug-and-play concept that can be made accessible to any urban community in the world through the Global Laser Run City Tour, the possibilities for growth of UIPM Sports in the region are extensive.

The unexpected disruptions of 2020 may have put the entire sporting world on pause, but Laser Run will be a catalyst for growth when restrictions on mass-participation sport ease. In the fifth part of the Laser Run Spotlight series, we speak to senior office-bearers from National Federations in Guatemala and United States to find out what their strategic priorities will be when initiatives like the GLRCT resume.

Guatemala: Why Biathle/Triathle crossover is key

Jorge Rodriguez

Executive Committee Member, Guatemala National Modern Pentathlon Association

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Q: Guatemala was one of the first countries to join the GLRCT. What was the initial purpose and have you achieved your goals and results?

A: Initially the objective was to provide an opportunity in Guatemala for all athletes to participate in an international event under the organization of the UIPM. The objective was fulfilled with the realization of this event for several years giving opportunities not only to pentathletes, but also to aspiring pentathlon sport at school level and enthusiasts of Modern Pentathlon.

Q: Is it correct that you focus on youth participation in GLRCT? How do you find and engage these young participants?

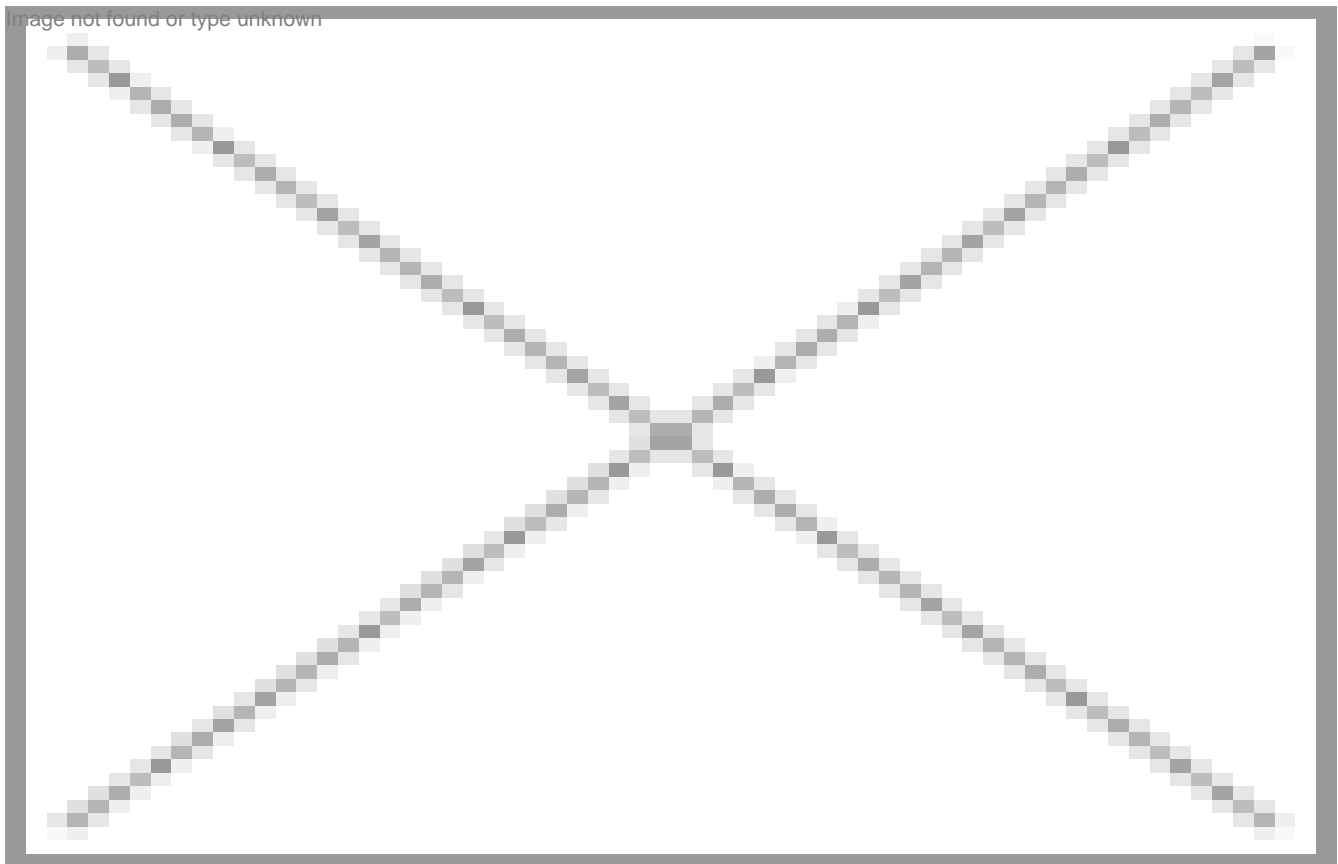
A: Aiming for the participation of young people in GLRCT is positive, in the sense that there are many activities with which sport competes for the attention of young people, and young people in Guatemala have enthusiastically engaged in practising sports, sharing with friends and getting to know the new facilities where these events take place.

The try-outs are carried out in schools with Biathle and Triathle variations and this is the main source from which athletes come. There are currently no Pentathlon sports clubs in Guatemala but a medium-term project is being worked on to implement it and cover all the national territory.

Q: At the UIPM 2019 Biathle/Triathle World Championships, Guatemala was one of the biggest delegations and more than half of delegation members were very young. Did any of

them also participate in GLRCT and other national Laser Run competitions?

A: Yes, most of the athletes who participated in BTWCH 2019 participated in Laser Run and also participated in national school competitions, Biathle and Triathle events.



Q: Do you have opportunities to offer Laser Run training only in the capital or also in other cities of Guatemala?

A: Currently there is an opportunity to train just in the capital city. However, we have an expansion project throughout the national territory to take this opportunity to more places in the Republic of Guatemala.

Q: Your NF was one of the first to organized online laser shooting competitions and there were many athletes from Guatemala in #LaserAllStars. How was your experience with this virtual event?

A: The experience was very helpful, the athletes once again had contact with athletes from other countries and were able once again to experience the excitement of competition. The good work done by the Guatemalan coaches during the quarantine time (April-July) allowed the athletes to maintain their training at home and when this virtual event was presented, the work was demonstrated by two athletes placing in 2nd and 3rd place in the U19 Women's category.

United States: Twofold journey to mass participation

Dan Browne

National Team Coach, USA Pentathlon

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Q: Your National Federation has become active in GLRCT since 2019. What was the catalyst for this activity?

A: I would have to say the leadership emphasis of the UIPM and the Executive Board was the catalyst for the prioritization of Laser Run activities within the United States. With this emphasis, we hosted three events in 2019 which were well received by those individuals who participated.

Q: For a big country with so many potential participants in Laser Run competitions, what is your plan to attract more participants in future?

A: The plan is two-fold. First, to continue to pursue identifying locations throughout the United States that would like to host GLRCT events. Secondly, to work with the various club systems throughout the United States in order to support their efforts to host Laser Run competitions and bring more people into the sport.

Q: What were the main positive outcomes from GLRCT in USA in 2019? Did it bring some more interest to Biathlon/Triathlon?

A: Through exposing individuals that participated in the GLRCT events we were able to drive some of those participants more closely into the Modern Pentathlon family. One example of how promoting Laser Run through the GLRCT events increased participation of Pentathlon activities in the US can be seen in the establishment of the Wolfpack Pentathlon Club in San Jose, California. Kirt Iverson saw the excitement of the event and took it to the next level in establishing his club.

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Q: Have there been any local Laser Run events in USA this year during the pandemic?

A: We have been limited in our Laser Run activities because of the COVID-19 crisis that has affected the world. Our emphasis right now is focused on the virtual Laser Run framework.

Q: What do you think about the future of virtual and hybrid competitions such as UIPM #LaserHomeRun and #LaserAllStars? How can we encourage participants from USA?

A: There's no question that as long as the threat of COVID exists, there needs to be opportunities for athletes within the Pentathlon family to compete. Virtual/hybrid competitions are an avenue to pursue that connectedness that is missing because of the global pandemic. We can encourage participants in the United States by continuing to promote at the UIPM level the opportunities that exist out there to "virtually" compete at these events.

Q: How does your NF see Laser Run in terms of a serious sport and also a sport for fun?

A: Having the UIPM Laser Run World Championships contested concurrently with the UIPM Pentathlon World Championships highlights the competitive aspect of the sport. USA Pentathlon views these opportunities as an important gateway and talent identifier for our organization.

Separately, there are many individuals that participate in Laser Run activities who are primarily runners that just want to try something unique and new. We welcome both perspectives because they increase the awareness of Modern Pentathlon in the United States, thereby driving the sport forward into the future.