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UIPM 2021 PENTATHLON WORLD CUP SOFIA (I): JUN (KOR) GRASPS HIS CHANCE



- World No.6 claims fourth gold medal in Men's Final in Sofia (BUL)
- Silver mends 'broken soul and broken heart' for Kasza (HUN)
- Palazkov (BLR) caught on last lap but holds on for bronze

He is never far from the podium and **Woongtae Jun** of **Korea** reacquainted himself with gold with a stunning victory at UIPM 2021 Pentathlon World Cup Sofia (I).

Three years since he last topped the podium at UIPM 2018 Pentathlon World Cup Kecskemet, Jun (KOR) reaffirmed his status as one of the favourites for the rescheduled Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games in the first of two competitions in the Bulgarian capital this month.

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Overcoming a 16sec deficit in the Laser Run, the world No.6 overtook leader **Ilya Palazkov** of **Belarus** on the final lap to build on the momentum of his silver medal at UIPM 2020 Pentathlon World Cup Cairo and bronze at the UIPM 2019 Pentathlon World Championships in Budapest (HUN).

An exhausted Palazkov (BLR) settled for bronze after running out of steam on the final lap, where he was also reined in by silver medallist **Robert Kasza** of **Hungary**.

Competition is remarkably tight in men's Modern Pentathlon this season, a fact underlined by the fact that 22 athletes finished within a minute of the champion.

There were remarkable performances in Laser Run from **Shuai Luo** of **China** (4th), **Fabian Liebig** of **Germany** (5th) and **Martin Vlach** of **Czech Republic** (7th), with **Thomas Toolis** of **Great Britain** finishing 6th and **Patrick Dogue** (GER) rounding out the top eight.

Swimming

After the failure of his team-mate James Cooke to qualify for the final, **Joseph Choong** (GBR) had free reign in the pool and duly set the pace with a time of 1:59.24 – almost 3sec quicker than his nearest rival.

Jun (KOR) was second-fastest (2:02.18) while **Bence Kardos** (HUN) also collected 306 points with a time of 2:02.45

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Fencing

Two athletes stood out on the piste and put distance between themselves and the chasing pack. Sofia was treated to a fine exhibition of Fencing by Palazkov (BLR), who scored 25V/10D, and Kasza (HUN), who accumulated 24 wins in the Ranking Round and won the final bout in the Bonus Round for two additional points.

In the shadows lurked a clutch of top-quality athletes on 21V/14D and 20V/13D, including Jun and team-mate **Jinhwa Jung** (KOR), **Adam Marosi** (HUN), Toolis (GBR), Patrick Dogue (GER) and **Valentin Prades** of France.

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Riding

The standard of horsemanship was highly impressive, with 10 clean rounds and no eliminations. Membership of the “300 club” with the maximum score included Toolis (GBR), who moved into 3rd in the overall standings, while Jun (KOR) and Kasza (HUN) each scored 293 to keep the pressure on the leader.

Palazkov (BLR) responded with great composure, matching that score with only one transgression to give himself a 9sec head start on Kasza (HUN) in the climactic event.

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Laser Run

If Palazkov (BLR) was nervous about the calibre of athletes pursuing him, he didn't show it. Two 9sec shoots followed by an 11sec and a 13sec made it very difficult for anyone to keep up with him and it was only towards the end of the third 800m that the chasing pack of Kasza (HUN), Jun (KOR) and Toolis (GBR) moved within sight of the leader.

The final shoot was decisive as Kasza (HUN) and Jun (KOR) held their nerve and Toolis (GBR), who had been competing strongly, lost his.

Aged 25 and still well within his athletic peak, Jun (KOR) bolted out of the range and soon moved past the flagging leader, who was also powerless to stop Kasza (HUN) overtaking and resorted to looking over his shoulder to check if anyone could deny him his first Pentathlon World Cup medal since 2018.

Nobody was able to do that, but the exceptional Laser Run times of Vlach (CZE, 10:29.60), Liebig (GER, 10:35.80) and Luo (CHN, 10:47.50) reasserted the point that there is no such thing as a safe lead in those 10-12 thrilling minutes when Laser Run specialists are around. Those three athletes had started the race in 33rd, 23rd and 12th respectively.

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Medallists' reaction

Reflecting on his fourth Pentathlon World Cup gold medal and third consecutive medal at a UIPM competition, Jun (KOR) said: "It's an incredible day. For a long time I missed the competitions and it's fantastic to be back.

"In the semi-final it was snowing and my body struggled, but today was nice weather and nice conditions and I'm very happy. I'm looking forward to the Tokyo Olympic Games."

Kasza (HUN) said: "Actually I'm very glad because it was very tough for me in Budapest in the last competition. For the first time in my life I didn't make the final, so my soul was broken, my heart was broken.

"Somehow I fixed it very quickly, and I'm very proud of my team and my family and everyone who supported me - especially Richard Bereczki who gave me a lot of cheer.

"It was quite a good day and all the pieces of the puzzle came together. I'm looking forward to the next competition and I'm so motivated."

Palazkov (BLR) said: "I'm so happy, of course. It has been a long, long road these past two years, especially last year with COVID, and I'm so happy to start competitions again. It's very beautiful."

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UIPM Secretary General's reaction

UIPM Secretary General Shiny Fang said: "Top six from six different countries! This tells a story of a sport with real universality.

"In Modern Pentathlon you don't give up until the last moment of the competition. You can be lost in one discipline, you can be first in your best discipline and you can also fight back in a fierce Laser Run like the one we saw today.

"Our athletes are trained to handle any variety of mental and physical challenges, the word 'toughness' is in their blood and I feel very proud of each of them today in the Men's Final!"

Watch and follow

UIPM 2021 Pentathlon World Cup Sofia (I) concludes tomorrow (April 11) with the Mixed Relay and the action continues next week with UIPM 2021 Pentathlon World Cup Sofia (II) from April 15-18.

Live streaming of all finals is available on UIPM TV, while all competition results are available at the UIPM website and the 'UIPM Central' app.

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Rank	Name	Nation	MP Points
1	JUN Woongtae	KOR	1457
2	KASZA Robert	HUN	1455

3	PALAZKOV Ilya	BLR	1451
4	LUO Shuai	CHN	1448
5	LIEBIG Fabian	GER	1446
6	TOOLIS Thomas	GBR	1443
7	VLACH Martin	CZE	1438
8	DOGUE Patrick	GER	1434
9	DOGUE Marvin Faly	GER	1433
10	MAROSI Adam	HUN	1432
11	JUNG Jinhwa	KOR	1430
12	PRADES Valentin	FRA	1424
13	PADILLA Manuel	MEX	1422
14	KARDOS Bence	HUN	1421
15	CHOONG Joseph	GBR	1420
16	CURRY Samuel	GBR	1419
17	TYMOSHCHENKO Pavlo	UKR	1417
18	ZILLEKENS Christian	GER	1416
19	HAMED Ahmed	EGY	1412
20	FERNANDEZ Charles	GUA	1411
21	SEO Changwan	KOR	1409
22	LANIGAN-O'KEEFFE Arthur	IRL	1404
23	SANDOVAL Alvaro	MEX	1398
24	ZVEDENIUK Pavlo	UKR	1393
25	HAMAD Eslam	EGY	1389
26	UNAL Bugra	TUR	1387
27	KUZNETSOV Maxim	RUS	1386
28	CARRILLO Duilio	MEX	1384
29	SEWILAM Alyeldin	EGY	1378
30	LEE Jihun	KOR	1366
31	KUF Jan	CZE	1359
32	PAVLYUK Denys	UKR	1356
33	VAIVADA Dovidas	LTU	1350
34	GUTKOWSKI Lukasz	POL	1332
35	HAN Jiahao	CHN	1331
36	SUKHAREV Vladislav	KAZ	1322