

13 MAY 2023

UIPM 2023 PENTATHLON WORLD CUP SOFIA: GLORY AND GOLD FOR BRYSON (GBR) AND PRADES (FRA)



- First-time medal for newly-qualified doctor Bryson (GBR)
- Prades (FRA) returns to the top of podium for first time since 2021
- Six medalists from six different countries on a truly Super Saturday

There were breakthroughs and comebacks on a truly Super Saturday as **Kerenza Bryson** of **Great Britain** and **Valentin Prades** of **France** took home gold from UIPM 2023 Pentathlon World Cup Sofia.

In crowning a first-time champion, seeing a former prolific winner return to the top of the podium and six medalists from six different countries, the Bulgarian capital was treated to two exhilarating finals that delivered drama aplenty.

In the Women's Final on Saturday morning, Bryson (GBR) crowned a remarkable personal week with her first ever World Cup medal as she held off a spirited attack from **Seungmin Seong** of **Korea** who took silver, also a first senior World Cup medal of her career. Earlier this week Bryson

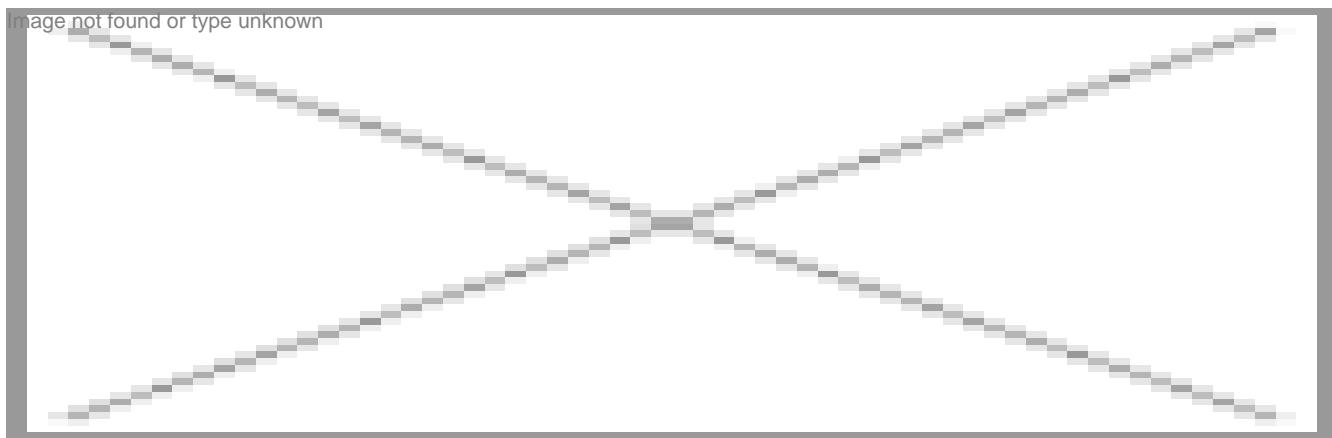
(GBR) toasted becoming a doctor and a maiden gold on the back of a superb Laser Run display was just the prescription to round off her celebrations.

Medals are becoming a much more common occurrence for **Ieva Serapinaite** of **Lithuania** who claimed another podium place as she took a deserved bronze to go with her gold from UIPM 2023 World Cup Ankara. Her vaunted compatriot **Laura Asadauskaite** of **Lithuania** was again in the mix as the two-time Olympic medalist finished fourth for the second-consecutive event with **Jessica Varley** of **Great Britain** in fifth and **Marie Oteiza** of **France** sixth.

French colours would fly higher later in the afternoon when Prades (FRA) claimed his first gold medal since the UIPM 2021 Pentathlon World Cup Final, his third triumph in that competition. With this year's World Cup Final back in Ankara (TUR) just weeks away and the first qualification places for next summer's Paris Olympics on the line in Türkiye, there was so much at stake in Sofia for those trying to book a Final spot.

It was Prades (FRA) who held his nerve and dug deep in an action-packed Men's Final Laser Run to wrestle the lead from **Taishu Sato** of **Japan**, who was overjoyed with his silver medal. **Marvin Dogue** of **Germany** bridged a four-year gap to celebrate his first individual podium since 2019 as he raced to bronze.

Having tried to claw his way into contention for much of the final, reigning Olympic champion **Joseph Choong** of **Great Britain** settled for fourth place with World No.3 **Balazs Szep** of **Hungary** slicing through the field to finish fifth and **Pierre Dejardin** of **France** sixth.



Medallists' reaction

Women's champion Bryson (GBR) said: "I'm so happy. I don't think it's sunk in yet, I can't really believe it. I went into this competition dreaming of a podium but it feels like it's been a long week. The course isn't that easy and I'm not going to lie, I didn't start the day thinking I was going to end up on the podium so I'm so, so happy."

"I'm not going to forget this. The rest of the girls did really well as well. We've done really well to get all four [Great British] girls to the final and to finish so strongly. I've spent six years studying medicine and I did my last exam a few weeks ago and got the results on Tuesday, on the day of the qualification. I was really happy to find out that I passed my exams. It's been a really good week for me."

Silver medallist Seong (KOR) added: "In the Fencing Ranking Round I made many mistakes but I focused again for the Riding and in the Shooting I had good contact so the majority has been good. Shooting, don't forget, is my style. The focus is really important. Today was very good."

Bronze medallist Serapinaite (LTU) said: "I'm really very happy to be on the podium again. It doesn't matter if you win gold or bronze, it's still nice for me. I did the best results in the Fencing, I did well in Swimming so this has maybe helped me to win this medal. I made a huge mistake in Riding because I was not Riding straight. This was my fault."

"It was really hard for me to run. When you are running third, fourth or fifth gap it's hard but this time in the first leap I felt hard in my legs. It was not a pleasure for me!"

Men's champion Prades (FRA) said: "I'm very happy. It's my first gold medal since 2021 and I worked hard for this. It's a consequence of hard work with my team and it's a good thing for the future."

"I just fight. I like to fight with my strongest [energy]. I'm happy because I won and because I know I can be better."

Silver medallist Sato (JPN) added: "It was a very incredible race. I have never felt this emotion. This competition has been an extra step [forward] for me. I want to thank everyone who has supported me, thank you so much. I am so happy today."

Bronze medallist Dogue (GER) said: "It's hard to explain now but there was a long time where I didn't show off my level and I think it was a lot of mental problems which I tried to fix. After the Olympics, I just took one year off then I changed my coach and last year was a little bit of a comeback. Now I hope I can rise up to my former level."

"I think I still sometimes have an image of being not the best rider but every time I want to show off my level. Today, for me, the horse was not so easy and the horse kind of exploded [forward] and in the air I lost one of my stirrups but in the end the points count. Next time I hope it looks better!"

Women's Final

Riding

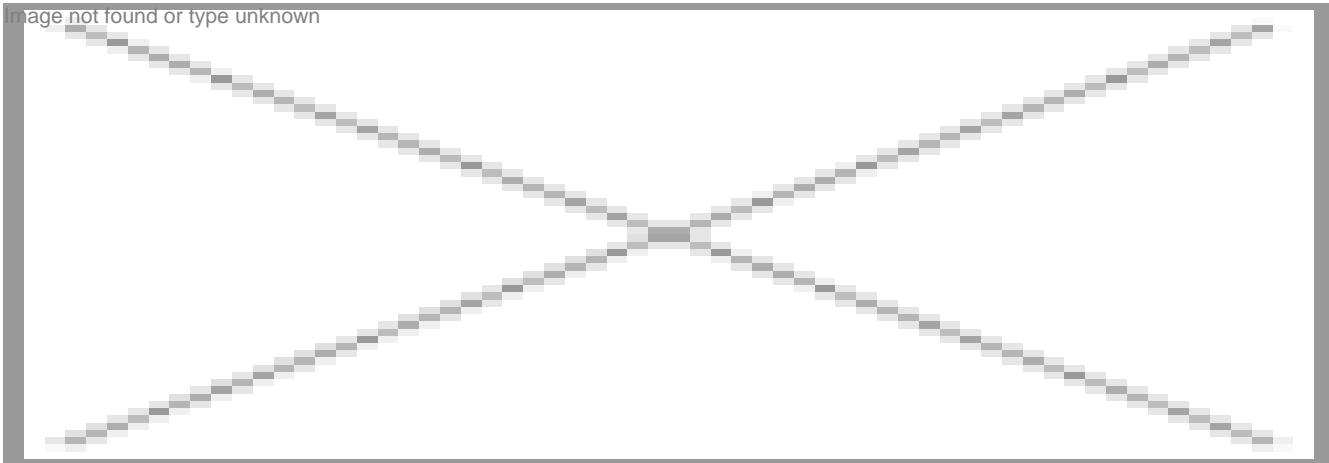
There was an early shake-up in the pecking order when the Riding round provided plenty of drama with three riders eliminated and leader Serapinaite (LTU) tumbling down the leaderboard too.

Yet there was also room from some stellar performances on horseback with five finalists completing perfect rounds. Bryson (GBR), her **Great Britain** teammate **Emma Whitaker**, Oteiza (FRA), **Elzbieta Adomaityte** of Lithuania and **Hungary's Blanka Guzi** all achieved top marks.

Teammates **Sunwoo Kim** and **Haeun Jang** of **Korea** both found peril as they came off their horses and were eliminated while **Blanka Bauer** of **Hungary** was the third athlete to meet a misfortunate result and score zero points.

In that context, Serapinaite (LTU) wasn't quite as unlucky however she had her own travails with a refusal, a knockdown and a time penalty all adding up to her losing 31 seconds which left her facing an uphill climb the rest of the way.

Her most experienced Lithuania teammate, London Olympics gold medalists and Tokyo silver medalist Asadauskaite (LTU) loomed back into contention as she scored 292 points in the Riding round with all of the pedigree to make up further ground.



Fencing

Serapinaite (LTU) had dominated the Fencing Ranking Round with 25 victories and began her arduous task of getting back into contention as she added four points in a Fencing Bonus Round where eight different athletes added to their tallies.

The Asian duo of **Sunwoo Kim of Korea** and **Xiuting Zhong of China** had been joint-second best with 22 victories in the Ranking Round, one more than Bryson (GBR). Kim (KOR) bumped up her tally marginally with two points in Saturday's Bonus Round but Bryson (GBR) picked up two more victories for four extra points.

Charlie Follett, the fourth of the **Great Britain** continent in the Final, was the Bonus Round's biggest winner as she added eight points to her tally on the piste.

Swimming

Bryson (GBR) carried a narrow lead into the Swimming round but, without the pool pedigree of many at the top of the field, her aim was to try to keep her rivals within reach.

Serapinaite (LTU) scorched to the day's fastest time, her 2:15.87 just enough to remarkably catapult herself back to the top of the leaderboard. But Seong (KOR) wasn't far behind with an impressive swim of 2:17.16 and Oteiza (FRA) third-fastest in 2:19.58.

Bryson (GBR) achieved her aim of staying within touching distance of the leaders with a time of 02:28.49 ensuring things remained close at the top.

Laser Run

In truth it was tight throughout the field with just 38 seconds separating Serapinaite (LTU) in first and Varley (GBR) in 14th. With so many capable contenders packed in between the stage was set for another exciting conclusion, in keeping with a superb UIPM World Cup season.

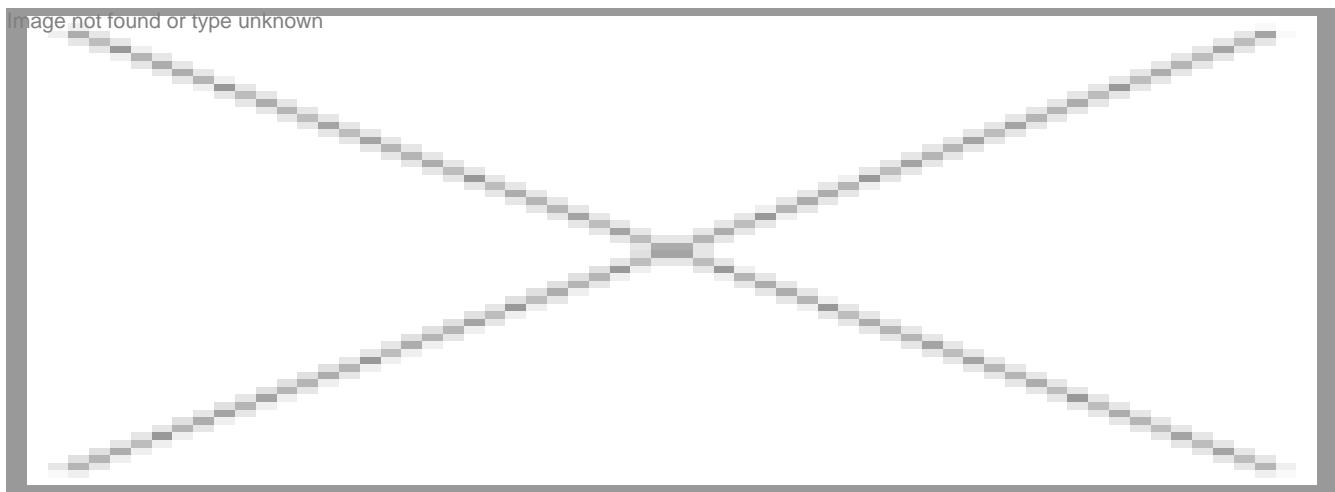
Serapinaite (LTU), a two-time UIPM World Cup gold medalist and winner in Ankara this season, led them off with Oteiza (FRA) and Zhong (CHN) both in hot pursuit. Bryson (GBR) began the Laser Run in fourth place, 14 seconds behind the leader but by the time they'd completed a formation lap and reached the shooting range for the first time she had moved into second.

Serapinaite (LTU) didn't display any nerves with a faultless first shoot with Bryson (GBR) equally dead-eyed. Behind them Seong (KOR), who had started seventh, was already making moves as were the dangerous Asadauskaite (LTU) and Great Britain teammates Varley and Follett.

When the front pair again shot nervelessly and set off for another lap, Bryson (GBR) put her foot down and surged into the lead for the first time and Serapinaite (LTU) struggled to stay with her. However Bryson (GBR) finally showed a hint of nerves as her third shoot took more than 14 seconds and tightened things up again with Seong (KOR) now up to third and Asadauskaite (LTU), at 39 years of age still one of the fastest runners in the field, looming into fourth.

The morning sun was finally shining as the athletes came in for a pivotal final shoot and this time Bryson (GBR) delivered, setting off in front with Seong (KOR) just a couple of seconds behind. Serapinaite (LTU) was out of gold contention but shot well to maintain her podium place.

Any hope of a sprint finish between the front duo was put to bed when Bryson (GBR) belied her inexperience by finding another gear and racing away to a maiden victory, the first British individual medal of the season. Seong (KOR) also claimed a first career World Cup medal with silver and Serapinaite (LTU) finished narrowly ahead of compatriot Asadauskaite (LTU) to secure bronze. Varley (GBR) underlined her class by finishing fifth having started 38 seconds back while Oteiza (FRA) came in sixth.



Men's Final

Riding

After proceedings over horseback had shaken up the Women's Final, things were somewhat more serene for their male counterparts with some exemplary displays in the saddle in the afternoon. Fully 13 of the 18 finalists racked up scores of 290-plus points and seven riders scored full marks.

Jihun Lee of Korea was among those who recorded a perfect round and it was enough to move him ahead of leader Prades (FRA) who had been travelling so comfortably until knocking down two late obstacles. Dogue (GER) was another to hit the full 300 points but his performance was unquestionably the round's most impressive, having lost his right stirrup from the first obstacle but somehow making it around clear.

The others to find perfection were Sato (JPN), Dejardin (FRA), **Marek Grycz of Czech Republic** and **Hungary** teammates **Richard Bereczki** and Szep.

Having been eliminated in the Riding round at UIPM 2023 World Cup Ankara, Choong (GBR)

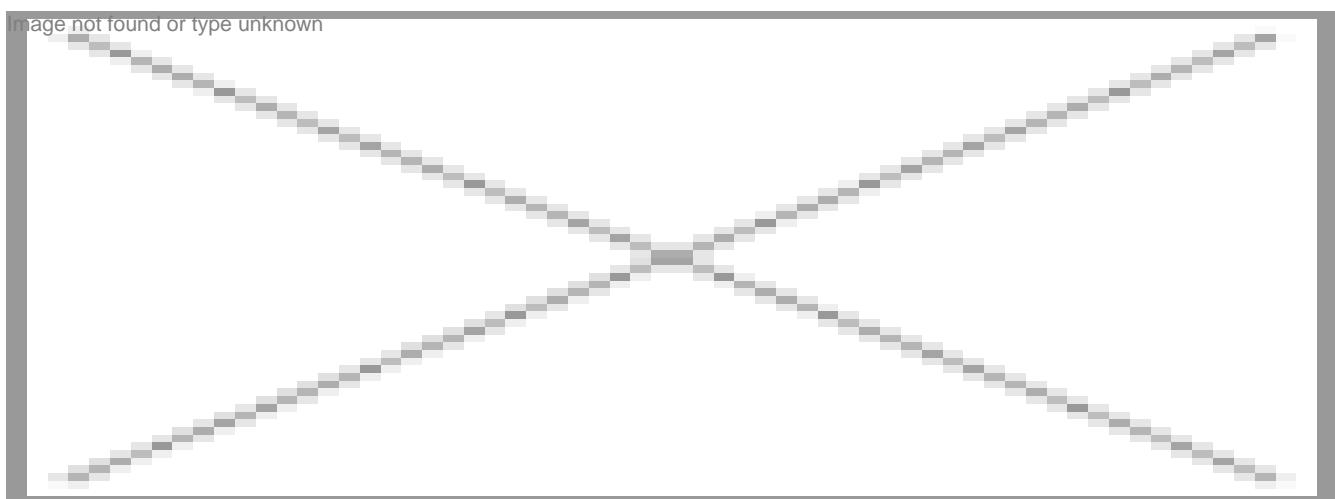
needed to be nearly faultless to stay in touch and he was just that with a lone obstacle penalty seeing him score 292 and **Eslam Hamad of Egypt** was even closer to perfect with 299.

Home favourite **Todor Mihalev of Bulgaria** had been enjoying a terrific week but his chances came to an unlucky conclusion when he was forced out of the saddle and eliminated. **Christopher Patte of France** was another to see his hopes dashed as he too was eliminated after a spate of refusals.

Fencing

Prades (FRA) had been in imperious form in Friday's Fencing Ranking Round racking up a phenomenal 27 Victories and he added what could have been a crucial extra win in the Fencing Bonus Round as he bested Lee (KOR), who himself had added four points to his impressive tally of 25 Victories in the Ranking Round.

It was ultra competitive on the piste as 11 of the finalists added points in the Bonus Round, with Hamad (EGY) and **Gergely Regos of Hungary** both adding six points each.



Swimming

All of the contenders would have been well aware of the pool prowess of both Choong and his **Great Britain** teammate **Myles Pillage** and the Swimming round offered the reigning Olympic champion the chance to move further up the field.

In the end the time of Choong (GBR) wasn't his blistering best but 2:06.69 was nonetheless fourth-fastest. Ahead of him **Ugo Fleurot of France** clocked 2:06.12 with Pillage (GBR) second-fastest in 2:05.62 and **Moutaz Mohamed of Egypt** quickest of all in a time of 2:05.37.

Lee (KOR) cemented his position atop the field with the sixth-fastest swim in 2:07.60, putting further time between him and Prades, who was second-slowest in 2:13.77

Laser Run

While Lee (KOR) would enjoy a 13-second buffer on the field, there was just over 30 seconds separating the leader and the top six down to Choong (GBR) and there were other deep threats in such a talented field.

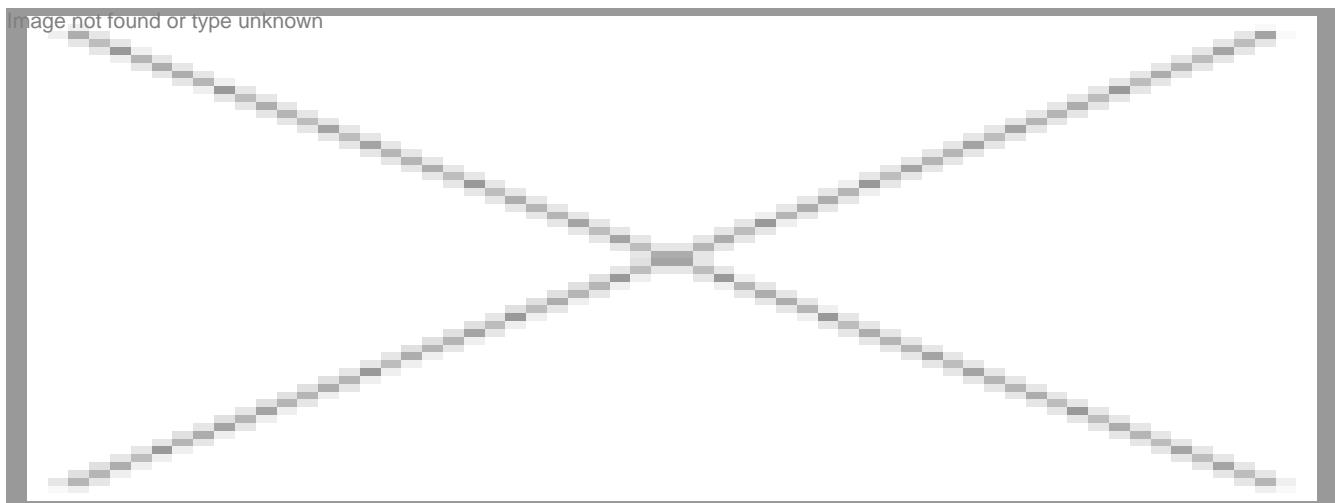
Sato (JPN), 13 seconds back, and Prades (FRA), 14 seconds, set off in rapid pursuit of Lee (KOR) and had already made up ground by the time they reached the range for the first time. As the leader struggled to find his shooting rhythm, Sato (JPN) put up five rapid green lights to take the lead with Prades (FRA) pushing Lee (KOR) down to third.

By the time they came back around for the second shoot, Dogue (GER) had already moved from fifth to third and Hamad (EGY) was also pressing the leaders. Further back Szep (HUN) showed all his class as he picked off rivals ahead of him. Choong (GBR) was performing well but couldn't yet find the burst to propel himself into medal consideration.

It was neck and neck and stayed that way through the penultimate shoot with Regos (HUN) now moving into contention for the extended podium too. Having bided his time, Prades (FRA) made his move shortly before the final shoot and took the lead from Sato (JPN).

Disaster looked to have struck when the leader took over 18 seconds on the crucial last shoot and both Sato (JPN) and Dogue (GER) jumped ahead of him. However the imposing figure of Prades (FRA) is built of stern stuff and he showed remarkable energy reserves to rapidly move up on first Dogue (GER) and then take the overall lead from Sato (JPN) and sprinting to a superb victory.

Choong (GBR) belatedly found his trademark burst to claim fourth with Szep (HUN) also showing his pedigree, jumping six places to finish fifth with Dejardin (FRA) narrowly pipping an exhausted Hamad (EGY) to sixth.



President's reaction

UIPM President Dr Klaus Schormann said: "This fourth UIPM Pentathlon World Cup of the season in Sofia has been hugely successful both from the perspective of the organising committee and the athletes.

"You can see how motivated the athletes are by the upcoming UIPM Pentathlon World Cup Final, they worked so hard to win the last possible points to qualify for Ankara.

"We know that the first automatic places for qualification for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games will be available in Ankara, and that makes this a very exciting part of the season.

"I want to thank the Bulgarian Modern Pentathlon Federation, the Bulgarian Olympic Committee, the national government and the city government in Sofia who have supported this important competition. And I want to thank those who selected the horses - we know we always have very good horses in Bulgaria.

"We now look forward to tomorrow's Mixed Relay, which will surely be another great competition."

Watch and follow

UIPM 2023 Pentathlon World Cup Sofia concludes with the Mixed Relay on Sunday, May 14. Live coverage is available on UIPM TV and up-to-date results competitions can be found at the UIPM website and via the UIPM Central app.

The next competition on the calendar is UIPM 2023 Pentathlon World Cup Final in Ankara (TUR) from May 31 to June 4.

