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VOYAGE TO PARIS PART III

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Leading off...

A century later, a world of changes are evident and yet Paris 1924 still impacts the Games of today

In this breathless era of breakneck change and an always-on digital world, going back a century feels like an indulgence. But it's a pertinent time to do so.

As July dawns we are now officially just 12 months away from the Paris 2024 Games. But one of the most compelling reasons the greatest show on earth is returning to the French capital is to mark the centenary of its last time hosting an Olympics.

The 1924 Games are widely seen as a coming-of-age moment for the Modern Olympics with the scale and the reach of the event surpassing anything that had come before. There were significant firsts and there was also something of a swansong for the mastermind behind it all.

Baron Pierre de Coubertin would step down as IOC President the following year but first he saw his home city put on one hell of a show. While the official opening ceremony at Stade de Colombes took place on July 5, competition had actually started as far back as May 4, meaning

events stretched for almost three months to the closing ceremony on July 27.

Paris 1924 was the first Games to feature an Olympic Village and also the first to be broadcast on radio with more than 1000 journalists covering the Games.

But what of Coubertin's beloved creation? Modern Pentathlon too was coming of age, Paris marking its third Olympic Games. The competition attracted 38 pentathletes from 11 nations with the United States breaking a European monopoly.

The five disciplines took place over seven days at venues across and far afield from Paris. First up was Shooting which was held in Versailles, where Pentathlon will return 100 years later next summer. Official capacity at Le Stand de Tir de Versailles was listed at just 82!

Next was Swimming where normal order took hold as Sweden, the country that utterly dominated the early era of Olympic Modern Pentathlon, took charge. Bo Lindman was fastest in the pool and would race all the way to gold after a third in Fencing, fourth in the Riding and winning the cross-country Running. Compatriots Gustaf Dyrssen and Bertil Uggla ensured another Swedish clean sweep. Within a decade, though, their absolute dominance would begin to fade.

The success of Paris 1924 ensured that more athletes and more nations wanted to be a part of the action. Almost a century on, that legacy remains strongly intact today.

> Paris Pointer

Heredia (ESP) makes a little bit of history as Dallenbach (SUI) bridges a 20-year gap

In the flash of an eye we have reached the stage of Olympic qualification that has observers putting down form books and instead reaching for history books.

The 3rd edition of the European Games in Krakow (POL) had a whopping 16 direct qualification quota places on the line, eight for female and eight for male athletes. And there were a lot of the faces you would expect to be there snapping up the golden tickets - we're talking about the likes of defending Mens Olympic champion Joseph Choong of Great Britain or Hungary's prolific Michelle Gulyas.

But sprinkled in among this sweet 16 were many amazing human stories — and a little bit of history. While her brilliant form in 2023 had led Laura Heredia to the brink of cracking the top 10 in the world rankings, the Spaniard was still going up against an entire Olympic history in her qualification quest.

No Spanish woman has ever competed in Modern Pentathlon at the Olympic Games, and all that looks set to change in Versailles next summer after Heredia earned a stunning silver medal in Krakow last week. That podium is in keeping with an upward curve that has seen the 23-year-old from Barcelona notch up three top-10 finishes at UIPM Pentathlon World Cups over the past year.

Heredia, who finished 6th in the Buenos Aires 2018 Youth Olympic Games, will now follow in the footsteps of elder brother and Tokyo 2020 Olympian Aleix.

Alexandre Dallenbach isn't quite at the opposite end of the career spectrum to Heredia, but the Swiss could be labelled a veteran. He is nine years older than his Spanish counterpart for a start!

And while he might not be making the kind of groundbreaking history in Paris that Heredia will,

Dallenbach (SUI) will nonetheless be bridging a hell of a gap.

Switzerland hasn't had an individual male Olympian in Pentathlon for 20 years (since Niklaus Brunischolz at Athens 2004). But after grabbing the 8th and final men's quota spot on offer in Krakow, Dallenbach's remarkable sporting life will now take him to an Olympic pinnacle. More incredible stories are sure to follow both he and Heredia (ESP) to Paris.

Numbers game

4 — -Winning one Olympic medal is hard enough, often the culmination of a lifetime's work. It's what makes them so precious. But the medals designed for Paris 2024 give winners a little more to hang on to. Each gold, silver and bronze handed out next summer will be able to be split into four, thanks to the design by French master Philippe Starck. "Today, more than ever, the truth is that you're not winning alone, so I wanted this medal to reflect that," Starck has explained.

Qualification latest

After the European Games, 18 of the 72 quota places at Paris 2024 have now been claimed.

Women: Italy (2), Spain, Great Britain, Lithuania, France, Hungary, Germany and Czech Republic.

Men: Egypt, Italy, Great Britain, Hungary, France, Germany, Poland, Ukraine and Switzerland.

Now the focus immediately shifts to the remaining 54. Next up for grabs is three more places for both men and women at the UIPM 2023 Pentathlon World Championships in Bath (GBR) in August. Full details can be found at uipmworld.org/olympic-games