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VOYAGE TO PARIS, PART V

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Leading off...

Swimming in La Seine for the first time in a century would surely get the Coubertin seal of approval

As the visionary and widely acclaimed father of the modern Olympic Games, Baron Pierre de Coubertin's place in history is both assured and acclaimed.

Across his native France you can find recreational swimming pools named in his honour, a tribute which feels particularly fitting given that the aquatic sport played a central part in Coubertin's creation of Modern Pentathlon.

The Swimming discipline has been a constant from the outset of the sport in 1912, with the distance changing from 300 metres to its current 200 metres after the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.

As the Olympics return to his native city of Paris next summer, there is already one legacy of the 2024 Games which would likely earn instant approval from the innovator himself.

From the Coubertin family home of 20 Rue Oudinot in the 7th arrondissement, the banks of the Seine were just a 20-minute stroll away and the great river will be both one of the centrepieces of next summer's Games and a lasting symbol of its positive effect on the city.

The Opening Ceremony of the Games on July 26 next year will see athletes transported 6km along the Seine while two events — Marathon Swimming and Triathlon — are set to take place in its waters after test events in recent weeks.

The Seine has been a no-go zone for would-be Parisian swimmers for over a century, with water-quality levels falling well below what was deemed safe for human activity and the city banning its residents from entering the waters since 1923.

However, an ambitious €1.4 billion clean-up programme has reduced pollution by over 75%. The newly built Austerlitz storage basin, a cylinder 50m in diameter and more than 30m deep, will store more than 50,000 m³ of water (the equivalent of 20 Olympic swimming pools) to help improve water quality.

The expectation is that all Parisians will be able to wade into the formerly restricted waters of the river within a year of the Games, with Mayor Anne Hidalgo recently announcing three monitored swimming zones which will open in 2025. One high-profile former citizen would surely be very pleased with the development.

> Paris Pointer

Brilliant Hernandez (MEX) ahead of schedule as he confirms Mexican surge and secures qualification place

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When Emiliano Hernandez teamed up with Mexico teammate Catherine Mayran Oliver in May to win a Mixed Relay silver at UIPM 2023 Pentathlon World Cup Sofia, he reacted by saying he hoped the medal could help be a springboard for personal success.

“I hope next year, an Olympic year, it’s good to me in individual,” he said.

It turned out that Hernandez (MEX) didn’t have to wait until 2024. At the UIPM 2023 Pentathlon World Championships in Bath (GBR) he became the first pentathlete from the Americas, male or female, to secure a Paris 2024 Olympic Games direct qualification quota place, thanks to a brilliant silver medal in the Men’s Final.

That second place followed a very productive June for Hernandez (MEX), who claimed a bronze medal at the UIPM 2023 Pentathlon World Cup Final in Ankara and a gold medal at the 2023 Central American and Caribbean Games in Santo Domingo (DOM). The run of success has propelled the affable 25-year-old to third in the Pentathlon World Rankings.

The Hernandez name, of course, has a special place in Modern Pentathlon’s Olympic history after Emiliano’s older brother Ismael claimed a breakthrough bronze for Mexico at the Rio Games in 2016. This success did a lot to spark the prolific generation of Mexican athletes which has followed.

In Bath (GBR), women’s world No.10 Mariana Arceo (MEX) was in the thick of contention right until the end of the Women’s Final, before finishing 6th. Both Catherine Mayran Oliver and Mayan Oliver (MEX) have been impressive this season, particularly in Mixed Relay where Manuel Padilla (MEX) has excelled too.

With the 2023 Pan Am Games coming up in Santiago (CHI) in October, the Mexican team have justifiably high hopes. For his part, Hernandez, was pleased to be the first to grab that all-important Olympic spot.

“I kept the composure and endurance to have a big fight,” he said. “I’m really happy we earned the place for Paris 2024, and it’s all about teamwork so thanks to my family, my team-mates, my coaches – it’s really a lot of work.”

Numbers game

15,726- — The distance in kilometres from the most remote venue for next summer’s Games and the centre of Paris. The surfing competitions will take place in the village of Teahupo’o in the overseas French territory of Polynesia, pretty much a world away from France’s capital city.

Qualification latest

After the UIPM 2023 Pentathlon World Championships and 2023 African and Oceania Championships, 24 of the 72 quota places at Paris 2024 have now been claimed. **Women:** Italy (2), Great Britain (2), Spain, Lithuania, France, Hungary, Germany, Egypt, Australia and Czech Republic (pending validation). **Men:** Egypt (2), Mexico, Italy, Great Britain, Hungary, France, Germany, Poland, Ukraine, Switzerland and Australia.

Now the focus immediately shifts to the remaining 48 places, and next up is the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou (CHN) from September 20-24, where five places for women and five for men will be secured.

Full details of the Paris 2024 qualification process can be found at uipmworld.org/olympic-games