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VOYAGE TO PARIS 2024: PART XI

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Leading off... It takes a village as Paris Olympic hub is handed over to organisers and it's all a long way from 1924

"In bringing young people from every nation together, [the Olympic Games] help foster this sense of cordiality that teaches men to become acquainted with each other better first and then to hold each other in higher esteem, a process that the Paris Games will have greatly aided."

Those words were not uttered by French President Emmanuel Macron when he inaugurated the Olympic Village in Paris's northern suburbs last week.

Instead the words came a full century earlier from Frantz Reichel, Secretary General of the Organising Committee of the Olympic Games Paris 1924.

This summer the French capital is celebrating a centenary anniversary of its 1924 Games — by hosting the extravaganza all over again. But the Olympic Village is also toasting its 100th anniversary.

The 1924 Olympics was the first to feature an Athletes Village, although the set-up was a little rudimentary compared to modern times. "These Games saw small wooden huts house the

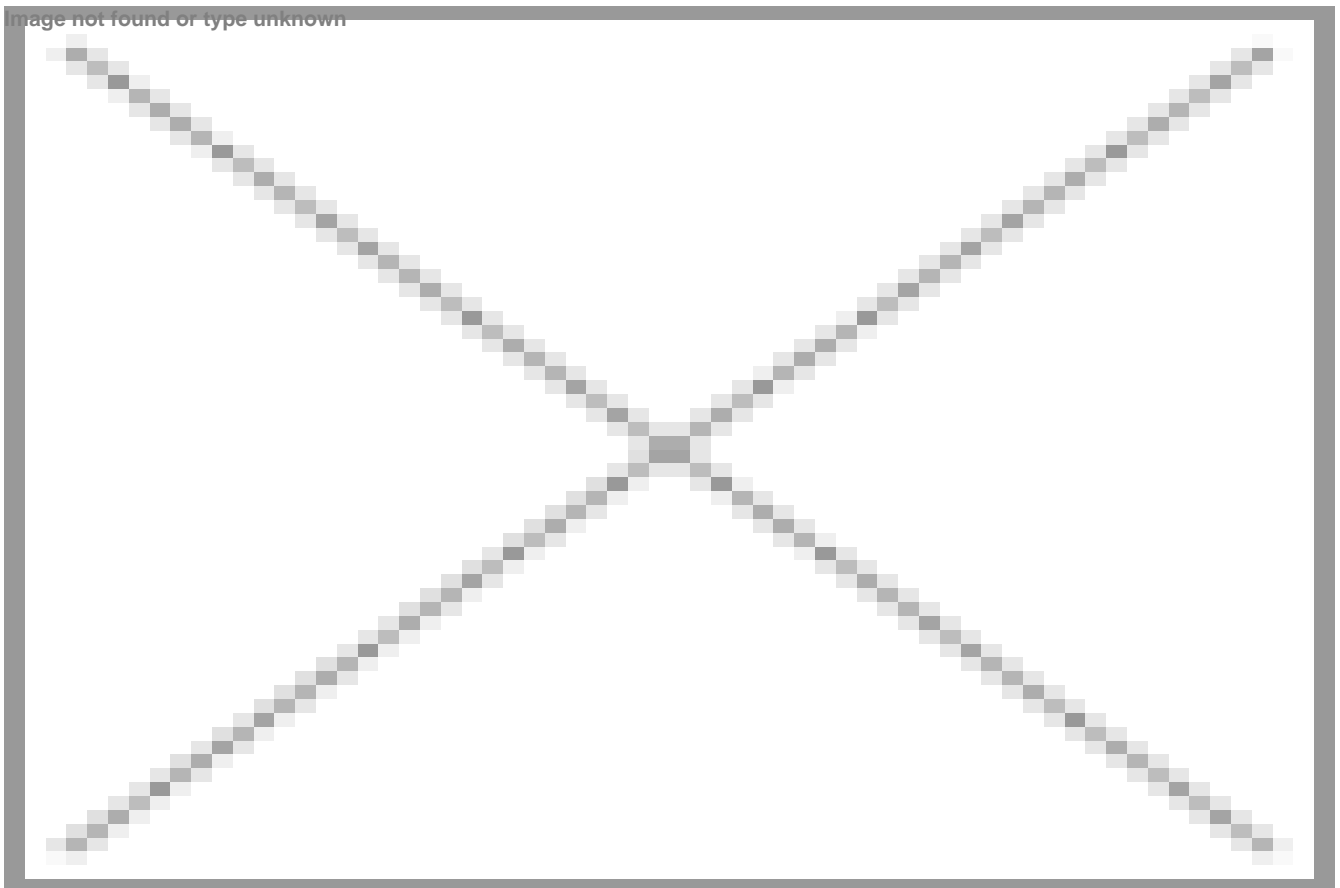
majority of athletes just a few minutes' walk away from the Stade Olympique de Colombes in north-west Paris," an IOC report remembered.

The 72 lucky modern pentathletes who check in at this summer's Village can expect more comfortable surrounds.

The 52-hectare village, located just north of central Paris stretches across the municipalities of Saint-Denis, Saint-Ouen and Ile-Saint-Denis, and will host 14,500 athletes. After the Games, the village will be transformed into an eco-friendly neighborhood with 2,800 apartments, featuring two schools, a hotel, a public park, shops and offices, plus planted areas for pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles.

The Olympic Village is always a hive of activity and energy during the Olympics and Paralympics. But now that the keys have been handed over to organisers, it doesn't mean things will be quiet between now and the Games. Organisers are set to spend the next four months fitting out the village with more than 300,000 furniture and decoration items.

We have come a long way from wooden huts. It takes a village, after all.



Paris Pointer : For powerhouse nations, the race to be among the lucky Olympians is hotting up too

If you think that the hard part has already been done by the Egyptian men, you would be wrong.

Four nations have so far claimed the maximum two Olympic qualification quota places: Egypt and Mexico (men) and Great Britain and Italy (women). For the Egyptians and the British particularly, the fight is really only beginning.

Such is the depth of talent in both nations currently that the identities of who ends up occupying

those two precious places in Paris is still far from a settled matter.

Next week in Cairo, a hotly anticipated UIPM 2024 World Cup season kicks off and observers on all sides of the Nile will be watching how their leading lights fare. Current World No.1 Mohanad Shaban would in most circumstances be considered a favourite for Paris. But the talent beside him is daunting.

Ahmed Elgendy made history in Tokyo by claiming Olympic silver and looked back to his best at times in 2023. However his younger brother Mohamed continues to shine, kicking off 2024 with victory in UIPM Pentathlon Challenger Egypt. Meanwhile veteran Eslam Hamad showed he still has plenty in the tank with an impressive silver at the Hungarian Indoor Open last month and 2022 U19 world champion Moutaz Mohamed continues to blossom. It's a crowded field.

We spoke last month in this space about how Kate French's return to the sport after an extended sabbatical could make the fight for Great Britain's two spots in Paris all the more ferocious. The reigning Olympic champion made her return in Budapest, qualifying for the final but did so alongside five of her compatriots with Emma Whitaker and Kerenza Bryson taking silver and bronze, respectively. Currently Great Britain has four athletes ranked inside the top 21 in the world.

More squeezes are on the horizon: Lithuania has only claimed one women's quota spot so far but boasts three of the top 14 in the world in veteran champion Laura Asadauskaite, Ieva Serapinaite and Gintare Venckauskaite. So while many are still battling to clinch qualification, for others the fight simply continues which makes every event so captivating.

Numbers game

3,200: The number of seats at the 24-hour restaurant at the Paris 2024 Olympic Village. Catering to 14,500 athletes, it promises to serve six different culinary themes (Italian, Asian, French among them.) and will include a non-alcoholic bar, a leisure area and training facilities.

Qualification latest

At last the race for the final 28 spots at Paris 2024 will resume when the UIPM competitive season kicks off with UIPM 2024 Pentathlon World Cup Cairo.

As things stand, 44 of the 72 quota places at this summer's Games have been claimed. Women: Italy (2), Great Britain (2), China, Japan, Korea, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Spain, Lithuania, France, Hungary, Germany, Egypt, Australia, Czech Republic (pending validation), Mexico USA, Brazil Ecuador and the International Athletes Team (EAI). Men: Egypt (2), Mexico (2), Italy, China, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Kazakhstan, Great Britain, Hungary, France, Germany, Poland, Ukraine, Switzerland, Australia, Ecuador, Cuba, Argentina and EAI.

Six places are on offer at the UIPM 2024 Pentathlon World Championships in June but there are 12 more through the UIPM rankings which makes the World Cup season, kicking off in Cairo, so key for those targeting rankings points. Full details of the Paris 2024 qualification process can be found at uipmworld.org/olympic-games