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UIPM 2015 WORLD CUP #1 – OLYMPIC QUALIFICATION STARTS IN SARASOTA

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Many of the world's leading Modern Pentathletes are embarking on the "Road to Rio" this week as the first leg of the UIPM World Cup series gets underway tomorrow in the Florida sunshine.

Over the next five days in Sarasota, nearly 200 Olympic-standard athletes from 35 countries will push their minds and bodies to the limit for gold and glory across the five disciplines of swimming, fencing, riding and the combined event of running and shooting.

With the exception of the Olympic Games and UIPM World Championships, this is the most prestigious event in any Modern Pentathlon calendar and excitement amongst the athletes, organisers and locals is at fever pitch.

World Cup #1 is a huge challenge for the athletes as it marks, for many, the start of the qualification process for the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio – there is so much at stake which can only add even more drama and colour to what promises to be a wonderful World Cup event.

Planning for the first competition of the UIPM World Cup series has been underway for some time and organisers have been meticulous in their detail.

The two venues, Selby Aquatic Center and Nathan Benderson Park, are in pristine condition and ready not only for the 300-plus athletes, coaches and officials participating, but also for the crowds – organisers expect more than 10,000 spectators to attend the weekend finals.

In between the breathtaking action, spectators can also enjoy a range of activities both sporting and cultural to keep them entertained and guarantee a festive atmosphere. There will be everything from interactive areas where fans can try out fencing and laser shooting to circus acts, cheerleaders and the Art of The Pentathlon Exhibit by the Ringling College of Art.

The Local Organising Committee has brought the arts, education and sport together by putting on a cultural celebration which will be second to none.

Katherine Harris, executive chair of Sarasota-Bradenton Modern Pentathlon, said at the opening press conference: “I would like to welcome all the participants in UIPM World Cup #1 to what will be the largest Modern Pentathlon competition ever organised on US soil, and I believe that this will be the best competition ever.

“We have prepared a complete event that caters not only for world-class athletes and their coaches but also to the community. As well as offering fantastic sports facilities we have organised an arts and educational event that fits with Modern Pentathlon’s cultural programme.”

Dr Klaus Schormann, the UIPM President, said: “I thank the Local Organizing Committee, USA Pentathlon and all of the team members who contributed to this World Cup. I also want to say a special thank you to all of the volunteers, the local community and the media. I am sure we are in for a treat at the exciting new venue of Nathan Benderson Park.

“I would like to thank Katherine Harris for delivering this high-level event following the success of last year’s World Cup Final here in Sarasota.

“This is a very important competition on the Road to Rio. It will also underline the value of the Fencing Bonus Round, which was approved at the 2014 UIPM Congress, and it will mark another step towards our goal of having a pentathlon stadium that accommodates all five sports in five hours in the same venue.”

Shiny Fang, the UIPM Secretary General, also thanked the Local Organising Committee and USA Pentathlon for their extensive efforts in setting up what promises to be a thrilling start to the elite Modern Pentathlon calendar for 2015.

Also speaking at the press conference were elite athletes Margaux Isaksen (USA) and Amro El Geziry (Egypt).

“This is my first event this year,” said Margaux Isaksen, a two-time Olympian. “Last year’s UIPM World Cup Final was one of the best events I ever participated in and I am looking forward to what is sure to be a fantastic event back here in Sarasota.”

Amro El Geziry, who won a Men’s Individual silver medal at the 2014 UIPM World Championships, expanded on that theme when he said: “We are expecting an even better competition this year and all of us are excited to get the season up and running.”

The Opening Ceremony at the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art officially opens

proceedings this evening (February 17) and the competition will get underway tomorrow (February 18) with the Women's Qualification. The action culminates on Sunday with the Mixed Relay Final followed by the Closing Ceremony.

Sarasota has become a world-class venue for elite Modern Pentathlon after it hosted a successful 2014 World Cup Final. That event was such a success that it was estimated to have generated more than \$1.9million in economic benefits for the counties of Sarasota and Bradenton.

The other venues for the 2015 UIPM World Cup series are Cairo (Egypt), Rome (Italy) and Kecskemet (Hungary), with the Final taking place in Minsk (Belarus) in June.