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PAN AMERICAN GAMES: STORMING PERFORMANCES AND NEW QUALIFIED ATHLETES FOR RIO 2016

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Women`s Individual

Athletes from Brazil, Mexico, Canada, Guatemala and Cuba secured qualification for the Women's Individual event at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games with stand-out performances at the 2015 Pan American Games.

In front of a capacity crowd of 1,000 in Toronto, Yane Marques (BRA) won gold ahead of Mexican team-mates Tamara Vega (silver) and Mayan Oliver (bronze). With one Olympic place per nation up for grabs, the other berths were secured by Donna Vakalis (CAN), Isabel Brand (GUA) and Leydi Laura Moya (CUB).

Marques (BRA) led from the start after she came close to breaking a fencing world record with only two defeats in the ranking round. The Brazilian athlete, who will be the subject of huge local expectation in Rio next summer, had the fastest swim of 2:12.18 and was among the best performers leader in the riding. She incurred only two knockdowns to advance to the Combined

Event with a huge head start of 36 seconds.

Second-fastest in the pool had been Margaux Isaksen (USA) in 2:15.54, and the best rider with the only perfect score of 300 was Ayelen Zapata (ARG). Melanie McCann (CAN) also enjoyed a clear round with a one-second time penalty.

Tamara Vega (MEX) was a consistent performer on the day. She was 3rd in the fencing and 4th in the swimming; only one fault in the riding allowed her to start 2nd in the Combined Event. Both she and Marques (BRA) held on to their places to cross second and first respectively and win their country a place at the Olympic Games.

The battle for the remaining Rio 2016 qualification places saw a storming performance from Mayan Oliver (MEX), who moved from 9th to 3rd to claim the bronze medal. Even more impressive was Donna Vakalis (CAN) who started in 11th place, 106sec behind Marques but ended up taking 4th place and giving the locals something to cheer with that all-important Olympic place for Canada. Vakalis (CAN) had the fastest Combined Event time of 12:44.83.

The most accurate shooter was Tamara Vega (MEX), whose 20 perfect shots took her a total of 32.9sec. Brand (GUA) and Moya (CUB) were the other athletes who had something to celebrate at the finish line.

Men`s Individual

Charles Fernandez took 2015 Pan American Championship gold back to Guatemala and gave his country reason to dream ahead of the Rio Olympic Games next summer.

Fernandez (GUA) secured one of five available places in the Men`s Individual event at Rio 2016 by finishing first at the “Pan Am” continental showpiece in Toronto. It was a dominant performance from the Guatemala athlete, who led from start to finish and broke a fencing world record with 284 points.

The two men who joined Fernandez (GUA) on the podium in Toronto – they will meet again in 12 months’ time, in Rio – were silver medallist Ismael Hernandez (Mexico) and bronze medallist Nathan Schrimsher (USA).

Completing the top five and securing their places at the Olympics were Jose Figueroa (Cuba) and Emmanuel Zapata (Argentina).

It was an eventful day due to adverse weather conditions. After Fernandez (GUA) dominated the fencing ranking round and the swimming was won by Schrimsher (USA) in 2:00.59, an approaching thunderstorm forced organisers to stage the fencing bonus round inside.

The storm actually broke midway through the riding event, postponing the rest of the competition for an hour and knocking out power on the shooting range and blowing over some of the obstacles.

The riding course was fixed quickly, allowing the 2nd round to continue and the best rider was Garnett Stevens (CAN) with 293 points. Power was restored only partially at the range, so the decision was taken to split the Combined Event into two series.

The top 14 athletes went first and all with a sub-2-minute handicap. Fernandez (GUA) started 17 seconds ahead of Schrimsher (USA) with Hernandez (MEX) a further 11 seconds behind. Fernandez held his composure to cross the finish line first and secure his Rio berth in style. Hernandez overtook Schrimsher at the third shoot to move from 3rd place to 2nd and Figueroa (CUB) moved up from 6th to finish 4th with the fastest Combined time of 11:46.19.