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ITALIAN DUO WINS THE MIXED RELAY AT THE EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIPS

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BATH, ENGLAND - Italy's Camilla Lontano and Valerio Grasselli won the first gold medal of the 2015 Modern Pentathlon European Championships after an exciting opening day at the University of Bath.

The duo performed consistently well throughout the mixed team relay competition, taking the lead after a strong fencing performance and producing the only clear round in the ride.

That gave them a 24-second advantage going into the combined run/shoot and while Russia's Donata Rimshayte was briefly able to overtake Lontano, Grasselli quickly reestablished Italy's lead and went on to win comfortably.

Belarus's Ilya Palazkov produced a determined sprint finish to beat Russia to the silver medal, while Pentathlon GB's Kate French and Joe Evans finished fifth behind Germany.

A delighted Grasselli said: "That feels very, very good. It was very hard and even a bit unexpected but it was fantastic – as the day went on, every sport seemed to go better and better.

"I was a bit worried during the first circuit [of the run/shoot] but the second one went very well.

"Camilla did very well, we are a team. She made the difference in some of the events and put me in a good position for the combined.

"We were here a few years ago [for the 2009 Bath International Competition] and it is great to be back."

Lontano added: "We are incredibly happy. We are not taking part in the individual events so it was important that we won a medal today."

There was a good turnout of supporters throughout the day at the University of Bath, with the home fans having much to cheer in the opening event – the 200m freestyle swim.

The British duo of French and Evans clocked an excellent time of 1:57.04 in the London 2012 Legacy Pool, one of only three teams to go under the two-minute mark.

They lost ground in the fencing and were unable to reclaim a medal position but French was satisfied with the overall performance.

"It was a really good start and we were really happy with the swimming result," said French, who will compete in the women's individual event on Friday.

"We lost touch a little bit with the fencing and we couldn't pull it back from there, which was a shame, but overall it was a good day.

"Competing at the same place we train is a bit weird but it's nice at the same time. We feel at home, have the home comforts, we know where everything is and we can get away from it all.

"It's really special to have your home crowd there cheering you on. I can't say I'm used to it!

"Fans should definitely come along over the rest of the week. It's a good fun day here, I'm looking forward to the weekend's event and it definitely helps competing in front of your home crowd."

Russia's Rimshayte and Alexander Kukarin were runners-up to Britain in Heat 2 of the swimming in 1:59.49, while Lithuania's Gintare Venckauskaite and Lukas Kontrimavicius were third in 1:59.55.

Germany's Janine Kohlmann and Alexander Nobis won Heat 1 in 2:01.53, making them sixth fastest overall.

Italy's Lontano and Grasselli were fourth after the swimming but hit top spot following an impressive fencing performance which saw them win 21 of their 32 bouts.

Russia continued their fine start by winning 19 bouts, a total matched by Hungary's Tamara Alekszejev and Bence Harangozo as they moved up the overall rankings from seventh to third.

French and Evans dropped to fifth, behind Belarus's Katsiaryna Arol and Ilya Palazkov, after winning 15 of their 32 bouts.

The Czech Republic pairing of Eliksa Pribylova and Ondrej Svehota only won 11 bouts but then enjoyed a four-bout winning run in the fencing bonus round to pick up some useful points.

The ride took place in a show-jumping arena specially installed on the athletics in-field for these championships.

And it proved to be an eventful one, with the Italians the only team to record a clear round and pick up the maximum 300-point haul.

Hungary dropped down the rankings from third to seventh after Harangozo took a tumble from his horse, which proved costly in time penalties.

Belarus and Germany both performed strongly to add 286 points to their total, moving them up to third and fifth respectively in the overall standings.

Britain also gained a place after a good ride, which saw French and Evans knock over a fence apiece and pick up just four time faults.

Ireland's Kate Coleman Lenehan and Tom O'Brien enjoyed their best result of the day, with their score of 252 the seventh best of the round and moving them above the Czech Republic.

Those places were reversed again during an exciting run/shoot, which saw Italy start 24 seconds ahead of the field.

That lead had been eroded by Rimshayte at the end of the first circuit and while Lontano regained the advantage in the second shoot, she handed over to Grasselli two seconds behind the Russians.

However, Grasselli produced the best shoot to again take the lead and he did not look back, going to establish a healthy winning margin.

Belarus were in a battle for bronze with Great Britain at the end of the women's circuits but some smart shooting from Palazkov saw him pull away from Evans and then reel in Russia's Kukarin to take a determined silver.

"It was a hard day," said Palazkov. "We didn't worry after the swim and fence because our best events were coming later."

Russia's Rimshayte was pleased with a medal, adding: "It's been a great day. I like this place, I always like to compete in Britain."

Germany's Kohlmann and Nobis produced the quickest run/shoot time of the day to finish just ahead of the British pair.

Nobis said: "It was a good run for me and Janine, and all in all it was an OK performance but I hope to do better.

"Finishing four or five seconds behind a medal is not great, you can see the medal but not reach it."

Lithuania completed the top six but were unable to make up ground in the run/shoot, with Kontrimavicius saying: "It was a bad race for us, the shooting was not so good.

"I'm looking forward to the individual competition and hope to do better. The venue is very good with all five disciplines in one place."

Six more medals will be handed out on Wednesday, with the men's and women's team relays both taking place. The action starts at 9am.

RESULTS – MIXED TEAM RELAY

Swimming

1. Kate French/Joe Evans (Great Britain) 1:57.04
2. Donata Rimshayte/Alexander Kukarin (Russia) 1:59.49
3. Gintare Venckauskaite/Lukas Kontrimavicius (Lithuania) 1:59.55
4. Camilla Lontano/Valerio Grasselli (Italy) 2:00.16
5. Katsiaryna Arol/Ilya Palazkov (Belarus) 2:00.35
6. Janine Kohlmann/Alexander Nobis (Germany) 2:01.53
7. Tamara Alekszejev/Bence Harangozo (Hungary) 2:01.77
8. Eliksa Pribylova/Ondrej Svehota (Czech Republic) 2:05.23
9. Kate Coleman Lenahan/Tom O'Brien (Ireland) 2:08.53

Fencing

1. Camilla Lontano/Valerio Grasselli (Italy) 21W 11L
2. Tamara Alekszejev/Bence Harangozo (Hungary) 19W 13L
3. Donata Rimshayte/Alexander Kukarin (Russia) 19W 13L
4. Katsiaryna Arol/Ilya Palazkov (Belarus) 17W 15L
5. Janine Kohlmann/Alexander Nobis (Germany) 16W 16L
6. Gintare Venckauskaite/Lukas Kontrimavicius (Lithuania) 15W 17L
7. Kate French/Joe Evans (Great Britain) 15W 17L
8. Eliksa Pribylova/Ondrej Svehota (Czech Republic) 11W 21L
9. Kate Coleman Lenahan/Tom O'Brien (Ireland) 10W 22L

Riding

1. Camilla Lontano/Valerio Grasselli (Italy) 300pts, 1:34
2. Katsiaryna Arol/Ilya Palazkov (Belarus) 286pts, 1:33
3. Janine Kohlmann/Alexander Nobis (Germany) 286pts, 1:30
4. Donata Rimshayte/Alexander Kukarin (Russia) 285pts, 1:37
5. Kate French/Joe Evans (Great Britain) 282pts, 1:40
6. Gintare Venckauskaite/Lukas Kontrimavicius (Lithuania) 275pts, 1:40
7. Kate Coleman Lenahan/Tom O'Brien (Ireland) 252pts, 1:50
8. Eliksa Pribylova/Ondrej Svehota (Czech Republic) 229pts, 1:59
9. Tamara Alekszejev/Bence Harangozo (Hungary) 223pts, 2:33

Run/shoot

1. Janine Kohlmann/Alexander Nobis (Germany) 11:32
2. Katsiaryna Arol/Ilya Palazkov (Belarus) 11:33
3. Kate French/Joe Evans (Great Britain) 11:44
4. Tamara Alekszejev/Bence Harangozo (Hungary) 11:49
5. Donata Rimshayte/Alexander Kukarin (Russia) 11:54
6. Camilla Lontano/Valerio Grasselli (Italy) 11:59
7. Gintare Venckauskaite/Lukas Kontrimavicius (Lithuania) 12:00
8. Eliksa Pribylova/Ondrej Svehota (Czech Republic) 12:17
9. Kate Coleman Lenehan/Tom O'Brien (Ireland) 12:32

Overall result

1. Camilla Lontano/Valerio Grasselli (Italy) 1464pts
2. Katsiaryna Arol/Ilya Palazkov (Belarus) 1448pts
3. Donata Rimshayte/Alexander Kukarin (Russia) 1445pts
4. Janine Kohlmann/Alexander Nobis (Germany) 1438pts
5. Kate French/Joe Evans (Great Britain) 1428pts
6. Gintare Venckauskaite/Lukas Kontrimavicius (Lithuania) 1398pts
7. Tamara Alekszejev/Bence Harangozo (Hungary) 1378pts
8. Eliksa Pribylova/Ondrej Svehota (Czech Republic) 1294pts
9. Kate Coleman Lenehan/Tom O'Brien (Ireland) 1281pts

Source: Pentathlon Great Britain