

17 SEP 2016

UIPM 2016 JUNIOR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS: CHARLES FERNANDEZ (GUA) WINS EPIC FINALE



CAIRO, EGYPT - After one of the most dramatic finales ever seen in elite Modern Pentathlon, Charles Fernandez of Guatemala prevailed in an epic battle with Jun Woongtae of Korea to be crowned the UIPM 2016 Junior World Men's Individual Champion.

A classic duel between two of the five 2016 Olympians in the field ended with Jun (KOR) overtaking Fernandez (GUA) at the final Shoot, only for the 2015 Pan American Champion to regain the lead in the final 200m and seal a breathtaking victory. Alexander Lifanov (RUS) won bronze.

An exhilarated Fernandez (GUA) said afterwards: "I am very proud and actually I have no words to describe what happened today."

"This year has been an incredible journey and I have been so close to medals but at the same time so far away. To finish this competition the way I did, I am really happy. After Rio I did not think I was on top form and able to do what I did today.

"I was even nervous about qualifying for the final because I know my body and it was not in the best condition. But I had to do my job, which is representing my country in the best way possible, and that is what I am here for and that is what I did. No matter if I will be the 1st or 2nd place, I will always give everything."

"What was fundamental for the last part was maintaining my head on the ground and making sure I was concentrating on each shot and in my tactics in running. That way I could use the very little energy I had to surpass Jun Woongtae in the last 200m and to become the Junior World Champion."

At the swimming pool less than 24 hours after their women won team gold, Italy's men started their final determined to maintain those high standards. Matteo Cicinelli (ITA) swam fast forward to record the best time in the pool with 2:01.11 (337 points).

His opponents were not very far behind, as Gustav Gustenau (AUT, 2:02.00) and Max Esposito (AUS, 2:02.03), in 2nd and 3rd respectively, arrived in tandem to each collect 334 points.

On to the Fencing hall, Sherif Rashad (EGY) made his supporters proud as he topped the leaderboard with 24 victories and 11 defeats. But the Russians always kept their opponents close and Alexander Lifanov (RUS) made sure to accompany Rashad (EGY) in 1st place, mirroring his results. The 3rd place was also secured by a Russian, Lev Kolyazov, who saw Seo Changwan (KOR) match his result of 23 victories and 12 defeats.

By the time they headed to the Fencing Bonus Round, the 2016 Olympians who are enjoying the spotlight in Cairo must have realised that many of their rivals would not have been out of place in Rio de Janeiro.

Joseph Choong (GBR) in 5th, Charles Fernandez (GUA) in 7th, Christian Zillekens (GER) in 9th, Jun Woongtae (KOR) in 10th and Esposito (AUS) in 21st certainly knew by now that their Olympic credentials would not intimidate their opponents as this is now a constellation full of rising stars of Modern Pentathlon.

Esposito (AUS), whose sister Chloe won the Olympic gold medal in Rio, needed to perform at the Fencing Bonus Round if he was to see a medal in on the horizon, having followed a 3rd-place finish in Swimming with 21st in Fencing. However, the Australian failed in his attempt as he was defeated in his first bout by Daniele Colasanti (ITA).

When the home contender Rashad (EGY) went up to the stage to defend his bonus point, he did not disappoint the home crowd. Rashad took no more than 10 seconds to beat the challenger Lifanov (RUS) using his great agility and skills.

The Riding event saw only two athletes obtain the maximum score of 300: Joan Gispert (SPA) and Yaroslau Radziuk (BLR). The high quality of the horses in Egypt has made the athletes' life more challenging at this Junior World Championships, bringing even more drama to the competition.

One athlete in particular enjoyed a great ride to finish 4th on the table and create enough momentum to start the Combined Event in first place. Fernandez (GUA) knows the strategies of Modern Pentathlon and once again he demonstrated that stability and consistency through the events are the best to start the Combined Event well placed. But with Gustenau (AUT) only 11

seconds behind and Lifanov (RUS) just two seconds further back, a happy ending for Fernandez (GUA) seemed destined to be subject to a dramatic chase on African soil.

When the referee fired the starting shot, none of the presents at the Cairo Equestrian Stadium could blink for 12 minutes. The champion of the UIPM 2016 Junior World Championships will also be remembered as the winner of one of the greatest Combined Events ever seen.

Immediately at the first Shooting series Gustenau (AUT) and Lifanov (RUS) switched positions behind Fernandez (GUA), who achieved the precision he needed to stay out in front. The Guatemalan was racing with a winning attitude and all bets were on him as the gap to Lifanov stretched to 20 seconds in the first lap.

But the Koreans were definitely willing to fight and in the second lap a new order was established by the duo Jun (KOR), who advanced from 4th to 2nd position, and Lee Jihun (KOR) from 9th to 3rd.

On the 3rd lap, Jun (KOR) definitely pushed hard at Fernandez and the difference between them was cut to five seconds. Further back, Lifanov (RUS) and Lee (KOR) were engaged in another vigorous dispute for bronze.

With the race completely open, the athletes arrived at the range for the last Shooting series. As the time lapse and apprehension in the crowd grew, a masterful show of concentration and technique on the field of play saw Jun (KOR) reach his target and surpass Fernandez (GUA) to take the lead of the competition with 800m left.

But whatever makes up the heart of 20-year-old Fernandez (GUA), everyone at the Cairo Equestrian Stadium would have gone away with huge admiration for this Central American trailblazer as he gave his all in the last 200m to regain 1st position and become the 2016 UIPM Junior World Champion, leaving the excellent Jun (KOR) to settle for silver.

Lifanov (RUS) confirmed the bronze medal after winning a great battle against Lee (KOR). Beyond the podium, a true highlight of this Junior World Championships was the profound exchange of positions in the Combined Event. In the Men's Final it was Esposito (AUS) who climbed up from 23rd place to 9th. Esposito (AUS) was the 2nd-fastest athlete in the Combined event with a time of 11:25 against 11:58 of the champion Fernandez (GUA).

Dr Klaus Schormann, the UIPM President, said: "What we saw in this Laser-Run was amazing and seeing three continents represented on the podium shows that our sport is fantastically well developed in all continents, and that makes me very proud.

"Guatemala is a nation that has organized big competitions in the past including world championships, and their win must represent a big push for more in the future. Charles Fernandez is a great athlete and also an excellent ambassador for our sport, who is now a Member of the UIPM Athletes Committee."

"We have a lot of hope for the future as the rising stars of pentathlon have already shown great talent and commitment at junior level. We can already say that this has been a very special and memorable championships."

The championships concludes with the Mixed Relay on Sunday, September 18.