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DOUBLE OLYMPIAN NICK WOODBIDGE RETURNS FOR EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIPS



Double Olympic modern pentathlete Nick Woodbridge is set to compete at his first event for almost a year when he represents Great Britain at next week's European Championships in Hungary.

Woodbridge was struggling with a hip injury ahead of last year's World Championships in Chinese Taipei in August but came home with a silver medal. His return to action at the Europeans in Székesfehérvár follows surgery in February.

"This year has really been quite difficult, it's all been about rehab," he said. "I'm in quite good shape, but I'm not quite 100 per cent at the moment. It's a long time since I've competed, so it will be good to see where I am fitness-wise.

"It's a bit of a warm-up for the World Championships in September, then I'll get in a serious amount of rehab over the winter. I should really see the benefits then," he added.

Woodbridge is joined in the men's team by Jamie Cooke, Joe Evans and Joe Choong.

Nineteen-year-old Choong, a first year Mathematics student at the University of Bath, makes his senior international debut after securing a place on the team by winning the GB Open in Solihull at the weekend.

"I'm a bit nervous, but it will be a good opportunity for me to prove myself," said Choong, who is still in his first year at junior level. "I don't really know what to expect, but my main aim is to make the final. I think I can handle myself at juniors now, so I will see how I can step up to senior level."

Pentathlon GB also has a strong quartet in the women's individual competition, including 2012 world champion Mhairi Spence and London 2012 Olympic silver medallist Samantha Murray both.

Spence is looking forward to the competition after returning to action at the World Cup in Kecskemét, Hungary in May following an ankle injury. She said: "This will be my first competition for a while when I've been fully fit, so I'm looking forward to it. We hope to get another team medal, but we all have our individual goals as well."

Spence and Murray are joined by Kate French, currently ranked 14 in the world and fourth at last month's World Cup Final in Sarasota, and by Freyja Prentice, who was the highest placed Brit at last year's European Championships, finishing fourth.

The performances of three nominated individuals count towards the team event medals. French, Murray and Spence won team gold at both last year's European and World championships.

Jan Bartu, Pentathlon GB Performance Director, said he is looking forward to seeing how Woodbridge fares on his return and how Choong does at his first major championships.

"Nick looks good. He's fit and healthy, but he's stepping into unknown territory after not competing for a year," said Bartu. "He needs to get back on the circuit and regain confidence. The semi-final will be crucial for him at the Europeans.

"Joe (Choong) is still a junior and this is first big major senior championships, so it will be interesting to see how he does. Everyone else has been there before, seen it and done it."

Bartu said he is pleased to see so much competition for places within the team based at the Pentathlon GB National Training Centre at the University of Bath.

"They all push each other in training and that helps them to perform," he said. "All of the athletes selected are competitive, but when they get to the championships the first hurdle they have to overcome is making it through the semi-finals. You usually have to compete flat out until the end in the semi-finals these days."

Jo Muir teams up with Alice Fitton for the women's team relay. The young pair recently won bronze in the same event at the European Junior Championships in Belarus.

Another young pair – Sam Curry and Tom Toolis – go in the men's team relay.

Samantha Murray and Joe Evans are currently scheduled to contest the mixed relay in Székesfehérvár.

Britain's pentathletes produced some impressive performances at last year's European Championships, with all four British women securing top-12 finishes in the individual competition.

Prentice was the highest placed individual finisher in fourth, while Murray (seventh), French (10th) and Spence's (12th) performances earned Great Britain team gold.

Cooke, Curry and Evans joined forces to win the men's relay bronze.

The European Championships start on Thursday 10 July and run through to Tuesday 15 July. The World Championships take place in Warsaw at the start of September.

The 2015 European Championships will take place at the University of Bath from 17 to 23 August and will be the first opportunity for European athletes to achieve the Olympic qualifying standard for the Rio 2016 Games.

British team for 2014 European Championships:

Individual competitions

Women

- Kate French – 11.02.91, from: Meopham, Gravesend – lives: Bath
- Mhairi Spence – 31.08.85, Farr, near Inverness – Bath
- Freyja Prentice – 20.05.90, – Inverurie near Aberdeen - Bath
- Samantha Murray – 25.09.89, Clitheroe, Lancashire – Bath

Men

- Joe Choong – 23.05.95, Orpington - Bath
- Jamie Cooke - 03.03.91, Cheltenham – Bath
- Joe Evans - 05.09.93, Whitchurch, Shropshire – Bath
- Nick Woodbridge – 01.07.86, Telford, Shropshire - Bath

Team relays

Women

- Alice Fitton - 05.08.94 from Atherton, Greater Manchester - lives Bath
- Jo Muir - 30.08.94, Dumfries - Bath

Men

- Sam Curry - 03.09.93, Salfords, Surrey - Bath
- Tom Toolis – 23.12.92, Hornchurch, North East London - Bath

Mixed team relay *

- Samantha Murray
- Joe Evans

*may be subject to change

2014 European Championships schedule

- Thursday 10 July: women's heats
- Friday 11 July: men's heats
- Saturday 12 July: women's final (incl team competition)
- Sunday 13 July: men's final (incl team competition)
- Monday 14 July: mixed relay
- Tuesday 15 July: men's & women's team relays