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LAURA ASADAUSKAITE TAKES GOLD AT THE EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIPS



Lithuania's Laura Asadauskaite surged from 11th to first to claim a dramatic victory at the University of Bath and add Modern Pentathlon European Championships gold to her Olympic and World Cup Final titles. France's Elodie Clouvel and World Champion Lena Schoneborn took silver and bronze respectively in the women's final on Sunday, while there was a popular team gold for Great Britain. Kate French, a member of that successful team, provided more home cheer as she claimed one of the eight Rio 2016 Olympic Games qualification places up for grabs. Asadauskaite – victorious on her last visit to Britain, the London 2012 Olympic Games – went into the combined event 59 seconds behind leader Clouvel but showed her class to begin closing the gap. She was up to fifth by the end of the third 800m lap and then produced an outstanding shoot to get out of the range ahead of Germany's Schoneborn. Clouvel still held the lead going into the last shoot but left at the same time as Asadauskaite, who then powered away to claim a famous victory. "It was a very good day – I had a good fence, a good ride and a good combined," said the gold-medallist. "This is a very good place and I really like it here in Bath – especially because I am champion!" Clouvel, who won both the swimming and fencing disciplines, said qualifying for the Olympics was more than enough consolation for missing out on European gold. "It's a good feeling," she said. "I am just very, very happy because I am going to Rio and because my father was here to watch me.

“My shooting is not very good, but I will work on it for Rio. I had very good running and was very fast but my shooting was so, so bad!” Schoneborn, a gold-medallist in the women’s relay on Wednesday, was relieved to be back on the podium after overtaking Russia’s Gulnaz Gubaydullina in the closing stages. “I was very glad to catch her at the finish,” said Schoneborn. “The whole day has been exhausting. I was satisfied with my run and my swim and I didn’t do too bad in the fencing but made too many mistakes.” Gubaydullina added: “Considering I have gained an Olympic qualification place I’m feeling great, even though I just missed out on third place. “Overall I’m not upset. I rectified all the problems that I noticed, so everything is great, in general, for me.” Poland’s Oktawia Nowacka, who finished fifth, said: “I had hoped to place higher because after my second shoot I was second but I don’t know what happened with my third shoot. “But it’s fine – I have Olympic qualification so I am very happy and it has been very fun. It’s a very nice place and organisation was great.” With Asadauskaite having already secured a Rio 2016 place through her World Cup Final win, the qualification places went down to ninth with the other berths going to Germany’s Janine Kohlmann, Ukraine’s Anastasiya Spas, French of Great Britain and Italy’s Alice Sotero. Kohlmann said: “I am very happy and I hope I can go to Rio next year because at the moment I am the second German to qualify. “I am so happy with my fencing, I have never fenced so well before and my running was also good. The last shoot was bad but I did enough. “The venue is amazing, it is so great to compete here and I am happy that I have been here.” French added: “I don’t think it’s really sunk in yet but I’m so pleased. My shooting was very solid and it’s just the best feeling.” Samantha Murray was tenth and Freyja Prentice 13th which, combined with French’s top-eight placing, saw the host nation claim team gold. Jan Bartu, the Pentathlon GB Performance Director who helped to bring the European Championships to the University of Bath, said: “This has definitely been the best event of the year, absolutely no question about it – I am so proud.” How the day unfolded Victory in the pool came from France’s Elodie Clouvel, who proved she was a very capable swimmer by topping the table with a stellar time of 2:09:13. She and Olympic silver-medallist Samantha Murray were the only two athletes to go below the 2:10:00 time after a very intense final 50m left the Brit just 37-hundredths of a second behind Clouvel. The Frenchwoman started the fencing with confidence and her additional agility with the blade paired with quick footwork enabled her to top the table after five rounds. Clouvel maintained the quality of her performance throughout the fencing and remained the leader for the duration of the event with an impressive 25 victories. Germany’s Janine Kohlman was also quick to climb the table as she and Belarussian Tatsiana Yelizarova lost just one more fight than Clouvel, placing them joint second. The bonus fencing round had a surprising amount of winning streaks but the longest by far went to Oktawia Nowacka of Poland, who managed to stay on the piste for eight bouts. Among the other athletes who had multiple turns on the piste were GB’s Murray, Russia’s Donata Rimshayte and Claudia Cesarini from Italy. The riding was off to a very bumpy and unpredictable start as a number of refusals and falls not only led to three athletes being disqualified but several others incurring penalties that heavily impacted on their overall score. It all seemed to calm down as GB’s Kate French completed the course with only one knockdown but it was Russia’s Gulnaz Gubaydullina who scored the only perfectly-timed clear round. Another clear by Anastasiya Spas of Ukraine put the two athletes in third and second place respectively but Clouvel had enough of a points advantage to remain in first place despite an average ride. She maintained that lead for three of the four shoots but, when she left the range for last time, had been reeled in by Asadauskaite who demonstrated the combined event was truly her forte. It was an incredible performance by the Olympic champion and a fitting finale to a truly world-class European Championships. *Source: Pentathlon GB Picture credits: Phil Searle*