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American pair are fan favorites

LAKWOOD RANCH

Nathan Schrimsher and **Margaux Isaksen** were far from winning the mixed relay event for men and women at the World Cup Final of modern pentathlon at the Sarasota Polo Club on Sunday. That honor went to Russia's **Ekaterina Khuraskina** and **Aleksander Lesun**, who handily won the men's modern pentathlon competition on Saturday in front of an excited crowd.



Margaux Isaksen, USA, completes her portion of the relay after tagging her partner Nathan Schrimsher, USA, US Army private, during the equestrian portion of the 2014 Modern Pentathlon World Cup Mixed Finals, a challenge of skill, agility and discipline, at the Sarasota Polo Club in Lakewood Ranch, Fla., on Sunday, June 8, 2014. (June 8, 2014; Correspondent Photo by Casey Brooke Lawson)

But by day three of a weekend-long competition that includes fencing, swimming, show-jumping, running and shooting, a Sarasota crowd showed clear attachment to Schrimsher and Isaksen, who competed this weekend along with USA's

Dennis Bowsher, Brendan

Anderson, Samantha Achterberg and Margaux Isaksen's younger sister, **Isabella**.

When Schrimsher and Isaksen, chosen to compete for the U.S. on Sunday based on their performances in individual competition, emerged from behind the bleachers to compete in a fencing showcase, a stagnant crowd came to life, chanting “USA, USA” and “Come on, Margaux.”

Annelise Threlkeld, 12, and **Margaux Arthur**, 14, of Sarasota were among them, chatting together excitedly as they watched the tall, lean blonde wave enthusiastically at the crowd, and then defeat **Victoria Tereshuk**, the Ukrainian standout and Olympic silver medalist who won the fencing event at the women’s competition on Friday.

“Her name is Margaux, too!”

“Did you get a picture of her?”

“She’s killing it.”

Isaksen and Schrimsher took No. 10 on Sunday in a competition that included one man and one woman from 12 countries. The Chinese pair, **Qian Chen** and **Jianli Guo** took second and Lithuania’s **Laura Asaduaskiate**, the 2012 Olympic champion, and **Justinas Kinderis** took third. Still, many in the crowd said they were there to watch the Americans compete.

Bringing name recognition to the nation’s best pentathletes is an important part of creating momentum going into the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, said **Tom Shepard**, a USA Pentathlon board member.

“After the Winter Olympics there is a shift in focus to the Summer Olympics,” Shepard said Sunday. “You are starting to see now more interest from the general public, the sponsors, and even the Olympic

Committee, who is going to make sure people know who the potential podium people could be.”



Margaux Isaksen, USA, completes her portion of the relay after tagging her partner Nathan Schrimsher, USA, US Army private, during the equestrian portion of the 2014 Modern Pentathlon World Cup Mixed Finals, a challenge of skill, agility and discipline, at the Sarasota Polo Fields in Lakewood Ranch, Fla., on Sunday, June 8, 2014. Correspondent Photo by Casey Brooke Lawson)

Despite its lack of prominence in the U.S., the “unspoiled” nature of the pentathlon makes it one of most accessible sports for the average spectators to be a part of, Shepard said. On Sunday, Bowsler and Isaksen had a few minutes to sit in the bleachers and talk about the riding event before spectators spotted them and asked where they train (Colorado Springs, Colorado) and whether Sarasota is one of the hotter world series venues they have experienced (Egypt and Mexico were hotter.)

Sport leaders in the U.S. want to do more to make sure people can learn and participate in the modern pentathlon. Athletes or pentathlon representatives are planning to visit Sarasota and Bradenton schools this fall before the cities host another modern pentathlon World Cup in February 2015, said USA Pentathlon board chairman **Barry Matchett**, and possibly start initiatives like introducing fencing to physical education classes. And the sport is always evaluating new ways to engage an audience that might not have the patience or the know-how to follow an all-day event.

This November, officials are supposed to adapt a new fencing showcase format that will be likely used in the 2016 Olympics. Athletes would likely be seeded for the showcase through the round-robin style tournament that currently makes up the fencing portion of the modern

pentathlon.

“It’s a little easier to follow if an athlete gets on a run,” Matchett said.

“You can start pulling for them.”

As the Rio Olympics draw nearer, Sarasota and Bradenton’s World Cup final served as an introduction to athletes that will likely be leading the way. At the event, Margaux Arthur was able to go up to the two-time Olympian who bears her first name, shyly say hi and ask for a picture. A volunteer poked her head into a tent and quickly got the autograph of **Pavel Ilyashenko**, of Kazakhstan. Annelise immediately took to Isaksen also, even though she had never heard of the pentathlete who took fourth at the London Olympics in 2012 before this weekend.

“She gets so excited when she wins,” Annelise said. “She’s focused and determined.”

Annelise and Margaux Arthur’s admiration of the American stars is the same that Schrimsher, 22 , said he felt when he first started training at the Olympic Training Center and looked up to athletes that had pushed him to be better.

“I wanted to be a role model like that,” Schrimsher said. “I wanted to inspire kids to achieve their dreams.”

Isaksen, who is headed to Moscow this week to participate in the Kremlin Cup, said Sunday that she doesn’t take being a role model lightly.

“I look to be a person with morals and values that my mom taught me as a child,” Isaksen said, “I hope that’s something I can continue to do justice to, make other children proud and make myself proud.”



KATY BERGEN

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