

PENTATHLON ARRIVES IN SARASOTA

BY JACOB OGLES | THURSDAY APR 28, 2016

SARASOTA -- For some Olympians competing this summer in Rio, Sarasota will almost certainly be a source of memories. The last opportunity for athletes competing in the Modern Pentathlon to qualify for the Olympics will be next week at the World Cup Final, to be held May 5–8 at Nathan Benderson Park. "It will be such an extraordinary experience to enjoy these moments with these athletes," said Katherine Harris, chairman of the local organizing committee for the event. "We have shown what Sarasota can do."

Athletes from more than 28 nations are expected to come to the area for the event. Sarasota beat out other international locales like Rome, Cairo and Budapest in the bid to host the competition. This event, the third pentathlon competition hosted at the University Park venue, will attract members of the US Olympic Committee, including Chairman Larry Probst and CEO Scott Blackmun, as well as a number of dignitaries from the International Olympic Committee.

The pentathlon itself, while not the highest profile event at the Olympics, boasts a strong reputation within the athletic world. A five-discipline event showcasing abilities in fencing, shooting, swimming, riding and cross-country running, the sport has been an Olympic event since 1912. "In the Olympic jewel box, it's a shiny diamond," said Liston Bochette, an Olympian who helped attract the event to the region. "This is a group of highly skilled athletes. This is not a dumb man's sport." Bochette credited Harris' reputation as a former



Provided photo: Veterans Larry Thomas, Darrell Xayarath, Jennifer Wright and Gerry Vonopal work at the Modern Pentathlon 2016 UIPM World Cup Final on Saturday at Nathan Benderson Park in Sarasota.

congresswoman and Florida secretary of state with securing the event here.

Paul Blacketter, president of the Suncoast Aquatic Nature Center Associates, said this event confirmed Benderson Park is now "part of the Olympic family," but organizers stressed that hosting an Olympic-level event here meant bringing more than just a solid sporting venue. Athletes will be able to attend a special concert and officials connected to the event have held community engagement events as well. The press kickoff on Wednesday, held at the Gillespie Park Reading Room, involved Bochette and fellow Olympian Agnese Butler speaking with area children. Logos for the event were designed by students at Ringling College of Art and Design. And of course, the event will bring millions in tourist spending; the past two Pentathlon events had an estimated economic impact of about \$10 million.