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Victoria Pendleton can challenge for triple gold at London 2012 Olympics

By Simon Hart

The International Olympic Committee has rubber-stamped the recommendation of the International Cycling Union to axe five of the races contested at the 2008 Beijing Olympics in favour of a programme weighted more towards sprints than endurance events.

The changes are designed to correct the previous gender imbalance and offer female cyclists as many medal opportunities as the men.

It means the disappearance of the two pursuits, considered by many cycling fans as the signature events of Olympics, as well as the men's and women's points races and the men's Madison.

But Romero's and Wiggins's loss is Pendleton's gain because the Olympic sprint champion now has the opportunity to complete a London 2012 hat-trick with the introduction of a women's keirin and a team sprint. She had previously complained at the unfairness of the lack of female events on offer.

There will also be a new men's and women's 'omnium' — track cycling's answer to the heptathlon and decathlon in athletics.

In a further change, the IOC also agreed to a new mixed doubles tennis competition, though expected alterations to the Olympic swimming events failed to materialise.

Britain's double Olympic champion, Rebecca Adlington, had feared that her favourite 800 metres freestyle event would be dropped in favour of a 1500 metres race but FINA, the world governing body, proposed no changes.

An IOC spokeswoman confirmed that the London 2012 programme had now been finalised and no more changes were possible.

Romero, who rode to individual pursuit glory in Beijing after winning a rowing silver medal in 2004, said she would now focus her attention on road cycling rather than the velodrome.

"I'm disappointed that the chance for me to defend my Olympic title has been taken away, especially only two years before Olympic qualification," she said. "But with challenges come opportunities and I'll endeavour to work harder than before to reach the podium in London 2012 in a third different discipline."

Wiggins, the Olympic pursuit champion in 2004 as well as 2008, said: "It's disappointing, but it's not something I can control. I can understand why they are doing it, but it's a bit drastic losing three endurance events."

British Cycling's performance director, David Brailsford, welcomed the changes. "The issue of gender inequality within the Olympic track cycling events needed to be resolved and in that regard, I think the IOC move is to be applauded," he said. "There were always going to be winners and losers."

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of being allowed to compete in further sprint events Photo:PA

Challenge is set: Victoria Pendleton has been granted her wish