

Publisher: Telegraph.co.uk
Provider:
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk>
Published Date: 10 Dec 2009
Article Id: 71195
Word Count: 406
Character Count: 1992
Estimated AVE: Currently Not Implemented



VERSION: 1 2 3

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/othersports/olympics/london2012/6780669/Victoria-Pendleton-can-challenge-for-triple-gold-at-London-2012-Olympics.html>

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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

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Publisher: Telegraph.co.uk
Provider:
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk>
Published Date: 10 Dec 2009
Article Id: 71195
Word Count: 493
Character Count: 2345
Estimated AVE: Currently Not Implemented



VERSION:   

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/othersports/olympics/london2012/6780669/Victoria-Pendleton-can-challenge-for-triple-gold-at-London-2012-Olympics.html>

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Victoria Pendleton can challenge for triple gold at London 2012 Olympics

By Telegraph staff and agencies

In a bid for gender parity, the UCI and IOC have agreed to a programme to begin at London 2012 which features five men's and five women's events - boosting Victoria Pendleton's hopes of emulating Sir Chris Hoy's achievement of winning three gold medals at one Games.

London 2012

The men's and women's individual pursuits - in which Bradley Wiggins and Rebecca Romero are Olympic champions - men's and women's points races and the men's Madison are to disappear in favour of sprints, keirins, team sprints, team pursuits and omniums for both sexes.

There were seven events for men and three for women at the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008.

The prospect of additional events was ruled out earlier this year, so wholesale changes were required to equalise the events for the genders.

The changes were discussed at this week's IOC executive board meeting in Lausanne, with IOC president Jacques Rogge revealing the changes this afternoon.

An IOC statement read: "The changes to the track cycling programme see the number of women's events increase from three in Beijing in 2008 to five in London, with the total number of track cycling events now at five each for men and women.

"The changes reflect the IOC's desire to continually refresh the programme, as well as its commitment to increase women's participation.

"These changes in the track cycling programme bring the number of women cyclists at the Games to 84, up from 35 in Beijing.

"Women will now make up 45 per cent of the total number of track cyclists at the Games (compared to 19 per cent in Beijing)."

Britain are the world's foremost track nation, winning seven out of the 10 available titles at Beijing's Laoshan Velodrome last year.

Hoy won three of those titles, little more than two years after hearing of the demise of the one-kilometre time-trial - the event he won in Athens in 2004.

Now Pendleton - already Olympic sprint champion - has the opportunity to replicate the feat she achieved in China in front of a partisan crowd.

The changes, however, mean yet another challenge for Romero.

The 29-year-old transformed herself from rowing silver medallist in Athens in 2004 to Olympic champion at the velodrome in the women's three kilometres pursuit four years later.

As Britain adjusted their programme when the changes were proposed, Romero turned her attention to the road time-trial.

She remains determined to reach the podium in a third successive Games and a third separate discipline.

Romero said: "I'm disappointed that the chance for me to defend my Olympic title has been taken away, especially at this late stage in the Olympiad only two years before Olympic qualification.

"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 (road cycling) - something I will relish, having previously excelled in the physical, technical and tactical journey of switching from rowing to track cycling."

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Publisher: Telegraph.co.uk
Provider:
http://www.telegraph.co.uk
Published Date: 10 Dec 2009
Article Id: 71195
Word Count: 266
Character Count: 1221
Estimated AVE: Currently Not Implemented



VERSION:   

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/othersports/olympics/london2012/6780669/Victoria-Pendleton-can-challenge-for-triple-gold-at-London-2012-Olympics.html>

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