



After seven finals in Diving and Synchro Already some surprises and good revelations

The 13th FINA World Championships got underway on July 17, 2009 with a diving event in the historical and monumental complex of Foro Italico, renovated for the circumstance and complemented with a glamorous Sponsors Village, already alive with visitors, who have at their disposal a food court and so on. Swimming and Diving are taking place in the main Swimming Stadium while Water Polo and Synchronised swimming are contested in the adjacent Tennis Courts (Water Polo in the Central Courts) both equipped with high tech temporary pools. The Media Centre (press) and the IBC Centre (televisions) are also swarmed by several hundreds of journalists already on duty to ensure a worldwide and comprehensive coverage of the Championships, which are being held in Rome for the second time after the edition of 1994.

The Opening Ceremony, held in a typical Italian style, took place in the evening of Saturday (July 18), in the harmonious setting of the Stadio dei Marmi, filled at capacity with a fashionable Italian crowd. The highest authorities of the host country were in attendance: the presidents of the Italian Republic and of the Italian Parliament, respectively Giorgio Napolitano and Gianfranco Fini and the Mayor of Rome Gianni Alemanno. Along with them, the presidents of FINA, of the Italian Swimming Federation and the Organising Committee, respectively Mustapha Larfaoui, Paolo Barelli and Giovanni Malagò. Some top Italian artists delighted the guests with their performances.

On the initial competition day, the first and only medals were awarded in the men's 1m springboard diving, with China taking both gold and silver, as expected: Kai Qin took the first gold medal awarded in the Championships, Xinhua Zhang the silver and Australia's Matthew Mitcham the bronze.

In the following two days, instead, the Chinese suffered two unexpected defeats in women diving: the first one in the 10m platform from the Mexican Paola Espinosa, 23, not new to international medals but on the highest step of the podium for the first time (leaving in the wake

Ruolin Chen and Kang Li, both seventeen). The second defeat was inflicted on the Chinese Minxia Wu (24, silver) and Han Wang (17, bronze) by Yulia Pakhalina in the women's 1m springboard: a well deserved, clear cut, success for the Russian veteran who might quit the world she loves so much and to which, in her words, she became "addicted".

The Chinese got back to victory in the women's 10m platform synchro with the pair of Ruolin Chen and Xin Wang, ahead of the Americans Beth Dunnichay and Haley Ishimatsu, and of – surprise, surprise! – the Malaysian Leong Mun Yee and Pamg Pandelega Rinong.

The home divers were hopeful to win a bronze in one of the events already contested; instead, with much disappointment (personal and of the home crowd), they stopped twice in 4th place: a cold comfort for both the Marconi's brothers, Nicola and Tommaso, in the 3m synchronised springboard and Tania Cagnotto, in the 1m springboard.

Same fate for the much improved Italian synchronised swimmer Beatrice Adelizzi who came in 4th in the final of the Solo Technical event, contested in the morning of day 4: Russia's Natalia Ishchenko was the winner ahead of the Spanish icon Gemma Mengual and of Canada's Marie-Pier Boudreau-Gagnon. On the Team Technical event, Russia also won a gold medal, again ahead of Spain and China that conquered its first medal ever – a bronze – at the World Championships.

Both Water Polo tournaments – men and women – are now underway. Except the victory of Spain over Serbia (11-9), on the first day of the men's tournament, no major surprise in the preliminary games played so far. Among the women, Canada and Australia tied (6-6) at the end of an intense match.

A rough sea had washed away the pontoon at Ostia, the Open Water venue, compelling the Organisers and FINA to postpone the events (5km on July 21, 10km on July 22 and 25km on July 25).

Medals Table
after day 3

| | Gold | Silver | Bronze | TOTAL |
|--------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| CHN | 3 | 3 | 3 | 9 |
| RUS | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| MEX | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| ESP | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| USA | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| CAN | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| AUS | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| MAS | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| TOTAL | 7 | 7 | 7 | 21 |

Meanwhile, the swim teams of the major powerhouses have already arrived in Italy and they are currently training in locations nearby Rome or elsewhere (United States in Riccione, Canada in Verona): most are planning to arrive in the Capital two to three days before the start of the swimming programme (Sunday, July 26).

SYNCHRO

Second gold for Russia, Canada on the podium

Natalia Ishchenko, from Russia, conquered her ninth medal at FINA World Championships by winning the second final of the 2009 synchronised swimming competitions at the Foro Italico in Rome (ITA) today. In the Technical Solo event, Ishchenko received a total of 98.667, leaving behind her Gemma Mengual (ESP, 97.833), the "eternal" second place competitor, as well as Canada's Marie-Pier Boudreau-Gagnon (96.000).

Like in the Technical Team, the main suspense of this final was in relation to the bronze medal, and Rome seems to bring luck to the Canadians in this particular event. The last Canadian medallist in solo was fifteen years

ago, in the Italian capital in 1994, when Lisa Alexander also earned the bronze. Since then, Russia, Spain, Japan and France have been dominant in solo. Already third in the preliminaries, Marie-Pier Boudreau-Gagnon (26 years old) is far from being a newcomer in synchro, but obtained in Rome her first major international success – before this final, she had been fifth in Melbourne 2007 and sixth in Montreal 2005 and at the 2008 Games in duet (solo is not on the Olympic programme). Marie-Pier's medal was also the first for Canada in synchro (for all events) since 2001 (when the Canadians took the bronze in the duet and team).

"I am extremely honoured to have won this medal. Natalia and Gemma are my role models, so I am very happy to be next to them. This is the first [synchro] medal for Canada in these Championships and I hope it won't be the last one – we have good hopes in duet and in the free combination, so let's 'cross our fingers'. Moreover, we are working very hard to come back to the top of the world hierarchy and our goal is to definitively get a medal at the 2012 Olympic Games in London," said the Canadian star, visibly thrilled with her bronze medal.

On the side of the gold and silver medallists, and as per usual in recent years, there was clearly some uneasiness in the respective acceptance speeches. For Natalia, winning seems natural and the whole competition is seen as one event after another, while for Gemma the silver can be "transformed" in gold if a favourable opportunity arises. Mengual (32 years old) arrived in Rome with 13 medals at World Championships and two Olympic awards (in both competitions none of these medals were gold) and she conquered in the Italian capital her second award (after being a reserve swimmer of the team that got silver in the technical final). When asked "and for when the first gold?", the Spanish champion smiled and replied: "I hope that in the five events still to come, we can touch the gold once or twice". Gemma Mengual started her impressive medal collection at home, at the 2003 FINA World Championships in Barcelona (ESP), and certainly wishes to finish her brilliant career listening to her national anthem at these championships in Rome.

For Ishchenko, it is her seventh gold medal (and ninth overall award) in this competition, after getting two titles in Montreal in 2005 (Team and Free Combination) and four victories in Melbourne 2007 (Solo Technical,

Team Technical and Team Free, and Free Combination). In Rome, she will of course fight for victory in the Solo Free, after being "stopped" in this mission in 2005 and 2007 by Virginie Dedieu (FRA), who has meanwhile retired from the pools. "We don't think in advance in the number of gold medals. We swim every event as such and we try our best," replied a very "diplomatic" Ishchenko about the rest of the competition.

Besides the medallists, Beatrice Adelizzi (ITA) was fourth – the best placing for Italy in recent years - after being sixth two years ago in Melbourne. Yumi Adachi (born in 1989) confirmed that Japan has undergone a huge renovation in their teams and that this new generation of swimmers still has a road ahead to travel in order to equal the excellence of their predecessors. Like in the Team Technical, Japan was fifth and the situation in Rome seems to be challenging for a country that loves this sport and is the absolute record holder in terms of medals in the history of World Championships – 39.

WATER POLO

Age no barrier for 'old man' Perez

When 38-year-old Ivan Perez steered a cross pass into goal with just over a minute remaining on the clock, Spain gained an unassailable two-goal margin over Serbia in the men's water polo competition.

Perez, the former Cuban who has patrolled international waters for nearly two decades and has a trophy cabinet full of medals, virtually assured Spain of Group C victory on the opening day with the 11-9 margin.

It was the game of the tournament so far when the game was level five times in the second quarter. Serbia was 8-7 ahead with four minutes remaining but Spain struck three times in a minute and a half and the game was tilted in Spain's favour. Alexsic narrowed it to one at 1:44 but Perez was Spain's saviour. Australia claimed the scalp of Kazakhstan 14-7 in the other group match.

Germany and Hungary won through easily in Group A. Germany rubbed out South Africa 14-4 and the triple Olympic champions of Hungary led their team to a 15-5 win over Canada.

Reigning champion Croatia looked ordinary in its opening match with Brazil before heading

back to school with an 11-2 victory in Group B. Montenegro takes top spot on goal difference with a more convincing 14-4 margin over China. Group D was watched by a large crowd when host Italy unsuccessfully took on Olympic silver medallist the United States of America, losing 9-8. In the earlier game, Romania shook off debuting Macedonia 6-4.

Game 9, 09:30, men, RSA 4 GER 14

Referees: Stephen KNIGHTS (NZL), Nenad PERIC (CRO).

Quarters: 1-4, 0-4, 2-3, 1-3

Extra man: RSA 1/8; GER 2/10

Germany proved a far stronger nut to crack for the South Africans. Germany was solid and persistently attacked the goals while South Africa struggled on attack and getting the ball cleanly to the big man, BELL. OELER proved disruptive to the South Africans and his five goals came quickly with the first four in the first 11 minutes of play when Germany led 5-1. His last-gasp goal in the third period came on counter and he toyed with the goalkeeper before dropping the ball into the goal.

Game 10, 10:50, men, CAN 6 HUN 15

Referees: Decio PATELLI (BRA), Igor MERNENKO (UZB)

Quarters: 1-4, 1-4, 3-5, 1-2

Extra man: CAN 1/6; HUN 2/3

Hungary used this match as preparation for future games such was its dominance. Hungary led 3-0 but Canada pulled the score back to 4-2 early in the second quarter. However, Hungary surged to 8-2 and 12-3 as the team shared the goals. DAKIC was constantly on the backs of the huge Hungarian centre forwards who managed to score at will despite the close treatment.

Hungary is playing with nine Olympic champions with the notable omissions being Tibor BENEDEK, Tamas KASAS and Tamas MOLNAR.

Game 11, 12:10, men, MNE 14 CHN 4

Referees: Gabor KISZELLY (HUN), Farid MONER (EGY).

Quarters: 4-1, 3-2, 3-1, 4-0

Extra man: MNE 6/6; CHN 1/8

The main excitement of this match was the efforts of the centre forwards who played a huge part in the game. ZLOKOVIC was tireless but so too were the Chinese hole men who might not have been rewarded as much. China had to rely on sneaking goals in on extra but the centre forwards were always willing to turn the bigger Montenegrins and chance their arms.



SOLO TECHNICAL

1. ISHCENKO Natalia RUS 98.667
2. MENGUAL Gemma ESP 97.833
3. BOUDREAU-GAGNON M.P. CAN 96.000
4. ADELIZZI Beatrice ITA 94.667
5. ADACHI Yumi JPN 93.334
6. IUSHKO Daria UKR 93.167
7. SOLOMOU Despoina GRE 90.333
8. RANDALL Jenna GBR 90.166
9. BERNARDOVA Sona CZE 88.667
10. KULKINA Anna KAZ 87.500
11. JOST Stephanie SUI 87.167
12. STEPHAN Giovana BRA 86.500

Game 12, 13:30, men, CRO 11 BRA 2

Referees: Mark KOGANOV (AZE), Nader GHAFOURI (IRI)

Quarters: 1-0, 3-0, 3-1, 4-1

Extra man: CRO 2/7; BRA 0/3

For a returning champion, Croatia looked extremely rusty. It was a day at the office Croatia would want to forget against a team it should have wiped.

The shooting was atrocious in the first half and Brazil's keepers had a field day. Brazil struggled to get any purchase on the ball in attack and took until five minutes into the second quarter before SILVA sent in a slider from five metres. The period scores would hurt coach RUDIC and the shooting statistic of 33 per cent was not good considering in the latter stages there were few misses. Well done, Brazil for making Croatia look far from a champion.

Game 13, 17:00, men, KAZ 7 AUS 14

Referees: Nikolas STAVROPOULOS (GRE), Radu MATAACHE (ROM).

Quarters: 1-4, 2-4, 1-3, 3-3

Extra man: KAZ 2/11; AUS 4/10

The Aussie Sharks looked sharp with excellent cross passing that stung Kazakhstan in the first half. Australia countered the Kazakhs for much of the game but slowed in the final stages. The final quarter was a goal-for-goal period of quality water polo and superb shot selection.

Captain WHALAN, a triple Olympian, showed his class with four goals from the top for Australia.

Game 14, 18:20, men, SRB 9 ESP 11

Referees: Erhan TULGA (TUR), Gaetan TURCOTTE (CAN).

Quarters: 1-3, 2-1, 3-2, 3-5

Extra man: SRB 5/14; ESP 6/14 This game was pure theatre as two class acts combined to thrill a growing crowd. Spain went three goals up at 4-1 but the game was tied three times in the third quarter. It was tied twice more in the fourth before UDOVICIC sent Serbia ahead and another goal went begging that could have had Serbia sitting pretty. Spain fired back into the game with two goals from MOLINA and one from MARTIN to be 10-8 ahead at 2:35. ALEKSIC grabbed one back at 1:44 but then PEREZ scored off the cross at 1:03 for the victory.

Game 15, 19:40, men, MKD 4 ROU 6

Referees: Mario BRGULJAN (MNE), Boris MARGETA (SLO).

Quarters: 1-1, 2-2, 0-3, 1-0

Extra man: MKD 3/9; ROU 3/9

The curtainraiser for the evening's main match saw Romania and Macedonia battle to a low-scoring but entertaining encounter. It was Macedonia's debut on the world stage but it

wasn't to a success. Romania had the early lead at

3-1 late in the second quarter but BASIC levelled the game at 3-3 14 seconds from halftime. RADU, IOSEP and DIACONU dragged Romania to a 6-3 lead. BASIC was the only scorer in the final quarter but it wasn't enough.

Game 16, 21:00, men, USA 9 ITA 8

Referees: Sergio BORRELL (ESP), Alan BALFANBAYEV (KAZ).

Quarters: 3-2, 2-1, 1-2, 3-3

Extra man: USA 5/6; ITA 4/7

This was the game of the day with a near full house of 5000 screaming on the host team. The USA took the quarter-time score to 5-2 before SMITH claimed a biting incident and pointed at CALCATERRA. RIZZO lifted the crowd with a shot from deep right-hand catch with two seconds left on the clock. The third period was full of drama with RIZZO converting a penalty and AZEVEDO scoring on extra. FELUGO tickled in a lob for 6-5. MANGIANTE had the game level at the top of the fourth but BEAUBIEN scored on extra and then again 90 seconds later for 8-6. CALCATERRA was stupidly left open at four metres to convert an easy goal for 8-7 at 2:36. AZEVEDO then repeated his 'shovel' shot off a cross pass for 9-7 at 1:23. CALCATERRA scored a captain's effort from centre forward when too late to force a draw.