

Monterrey 2008, Day 1: Championships Records in all finals on opening day

Camillo Cametti, FINA Press Commission Chairman

Exactly thirty days prior to the inauguration of the Olympic Games in Beijing, the second edition of the FINA World Junior Championships got underway today in the indoor swimming complex of UANL, Monterrey's major university. The meet, organised by both the Mexican Swimming Federation, headed by Javier Careaga, and FINA, spreads over six days, instead of five which characterised the inaugural edition two years ago in 2006, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It was found that the programme there was too squeezed, and FINA has decided to add one more day to the competition which has attracted about 600 swimmers from 66 countries. Among the most numerous delegations are those of the host country Mexico and of the neighbouring United States of America.

The major local authorities and the top FINA officials – including the president Mustapha Larfaoui, the Honorary Treasurer Dr. Julio Maglione and the Executive Director Cornel Marculescu - were in attendance and delivered speeches during the colourful opening ceremony, which featured traditional Mexican music and dances performed by youth.

Italy was the most successful country of the first edition, with its swimmers winning 17 medals of which 9 gold, 6 silver and 2 bronze. This time the Italian delegation consists of only 16 swimmers. Italy's head coach Walter Bolognani refused to accept the label of World Champion 2006 for Italy. He noted that "in Rio de Janeiro some of the world swimming powerhouses – namely the USA, Great Britain and China – were missing, which deprived the unofficial title of World Champion of its fundamentals.



The Indoor Swimming Complex of UANL - *credit: Satiro Sodré*

The United States won half of the four finals and immediately jumped on top of the medal table by country with two gold medals.

However the opening race of the Championships, as well the first final, the men's 400m freestyle, was dominated by the Europeans, who conquered the first four places. Danila Izotov (1991), of Russia, dominated the event swimming in lane 3, always ahead of his opponents. He was followed throughout the race by the Italian Alex Di Giorgio, who had scored the best preliminary time with 3:55.38 and was swimming in lane 4 and by Poland's Krzysztof Pielowski, in lane 2. The French Raoul Shaw came in fourth, ahead of South Africa's Heerden Herman.

The times of the medallists were all well under the time of the winner in Rio de Janeiro (3:54.90). Izotov clocked 3:51.81, Di Giorgio 3:53.19 and Pielowski 3:53.66.

The answer from the other continents came immediately. Dagny Knutson (1992) of the United States went under the existing championships record by nearly 4 seconds to win the title in 4:43.49, ahead of Australia's

Ellen Fullerton (4:45.17) who strenuously attempted to oppose to the narrow superiority of the rival. For the bronze medal Canada's Barbara Jardin (4:49.10) beat the second American Kirstie Chen (4:49.71) by less than a second.

Italy's second medal of the day, this time a shining gold, came in the men's 4x100m freestyle relay, which the quartet composed by Luca Dotto (50.57), Marco Orsi (48.99), Fabio Gimondi (50.33) and Luca Leonardi (49.20) dominated throughout in a demonstration of clear cut superiority: their aggregated time was of The Italians had set the best preliminary time with 3:22.17, a championships record. In the final they swam much faster, in order to secure a well deserved gold medal, ahead of a combative Russian team and a promising Brazilian quartet.

In the last event of the day, the women's 4x200m freestyle, the United States and Great Britain staged an interesting duel resolved by the US quartet in their favour in the last lap of the third leg, thanks to Dagny Knutson (1:59.24). Then the USA's anchor leg, Elizabeth Pelton held on (2:01.80) to clinch a well deserved title with the time of 8:06.52, almost 6 seconds under the previous championships record. The UK's quartet clocked 8:10.08, just a fraction ahead of bronze medallist Canada (8:10.39). Spain was fourth. Lead off for the USA was Samantha Tucker (2:01.69) while Lily Moldenhauer swam the second leg (2:01.76).

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2nd FINA World Junior Championships - 600 swimmers from 66 countries - *credit: Satiro Sodré*

The semi-finals too produced good results.

In the women's 50m breaststroke all first three qualifiers – Amanda Reason (CAN, 31.25), Anna Carlson (USA, 31.91), Samantha Marshall (AUS, 32.01) swam under the previous championships record of 32.05.

Championships record twice for New Zealand's Daniel Bell (1990), the best qualifier in the men's 100m backstroke semi-finals with 54.99, which improved his fresh record of the morning (55.62). Curiously all four fastest qualifiers come from the Southern Hemisphere: behind Bell we find Australia's Benjamin Treffers (1991, 55.93), Bell's compatriot Kurt Basset (1990, 56.21) and South Africa's Darren Murray (1991, 56.30).

In the men's 100m breaststroke the three top qualifiers were Marco Koch (GER, 1:02.59), Daniel Sliwiniski (GBR, 1:02.60) and Andrea Toniato (ITA, 1:02.94).

Fifteen-year-old American Elizabeth Pelton (1993) set the fastest time in the women's 100m backstroke semi-finals, with 1:01.41, her second championships record of the day. In the morning she had been timed in

1:02.08.
