Like two peas in a pod

Sarah Chiarello, FINA Communications Department

Duet synchro swimmers are like two peas in a pod. Why? Because after spending months and years training and competing together, they inevitably develop some sort of special connection. They share the ups and downs of this demanding sport, celebrate success and overcome deception, like best friends or sisters do. Tonight, such close connection was visible in many of the duets free routine, but also out of the pool. Russian pair Natalia Ishchenko/Svetlana Romashina, who already swam the Duet free together in Rome, repeated as World champions, amassing a total score of 98.410 while identical twins Tingting and Wenwen Jiang from China overtook Spanish rivals Andrea Fuentes and Ona Carbonell by 0.310 point for an overall 96.810.

Wearing their hair in two orange-sequined buns with bow ties and glittering doll-themed swimsuits which perfectly matched their music (a piece from the French movie “Amelie”), the Russians “hypnotised” the audience with their lively and speedy routine. Their movements were so synchronised that sometimes it looked as if there was only one pair of legs in the water! Making funny faces and pulling on their swimsuit strap enhanced the theatrical aspect of their routine.

Romashina, who has combined with Ishchenko at European and international competitions since 2005, revealed they prepared their routine in just two months: “We incorporated new technical and free elements. I like training with her. She is a perfectionist.”

Local stars Tingting and Wenwen Jiang delighted the crowd with their elegant routine based on “Swans”, bagging their sixth medal for China (five silvers and a bronze). The 25-year-olds had clinched bronze in Rome before improving to a gold-medal finish at the 2010 Asian Games in Guangzhou. The sisters proved themselves tremendous, intertwining their legs to near-perfection and mirroring each of their acrobatic movements.
“Beside identical physicality, there is this advantage of natural harmony between us, so we don’t need to spend too much time on it. We also have certain advantages because we have been competing for many years together,” Wenwen explained.

American Mary Killman and Lyssa Wallace, who this year swim for the first time together, placed 11th. For them, the additional advantage that the Jiang siblings have, is obvious: “They easily match because they look the same, but also because as twins they have a very strong awareness of each other.”

Swimming to “La Comparsita”, Andrea Fuentes and Ona Carbonell transformed the pool into a dance floor, their legs hitting the water to the rhythm of their passionate Tango piece. In the end, the Spaniards failed to defend their silver medal from Rome and had to settle for the minor one.

They too used chemistry to enhance their routine: “We are very proud of ourselves, especially that it’s the first time we compete in the duet together at a World Championship. I like working with her because we are ‘synchronised’ in heart and mind.”

Using a rock piece by Metallica, the Canadians Marie-Pier Boudreau-Gagnon and Elise Marcotte finished at the podium’s “door”: “We were not at all disappointed with our performance. Our objective tonight was to show that we can swim with synchronisation and good technical elements,” the energetic duo concluded.

The pair started training their duet last February: “We are a new pair and as we develop, we keep performing better at competitions.”

But out of the pool, the two have been best friends for years and know this is an asset: “We are used to train together and we know each other’s strengths and weaknesses. In the beginning, nobody was very sure this combination could work but over time we both developed certain technical abilities that brought out our resemblance.”

Japan’s Yukiko Inui/Chisa Kobayashi and Daria Iushko/Kseniya Sydorenko from Ukraine both moved up to fifth and sixth, respectively, after a sixth and seventh place-finish in Rome while Italian Giulia Lapi/Mariangela Perrupato dropped two spots from their 2009 classification and finished seventh.
The British pair finally achieved its goal to come top-8 at a World Championship (they were 10th in Rome). For Olivia Allison, who has been competing with Jenna Randall since 2006, mutual understanding is a key in a duet: “If you have a deep level of relationship, it’s definitely a lot easier to get on under a situation of pressure like this”.

France’s Sara Labrousse and Chloe Willhelm finished ninth, ahead of Greek pair Evangelia Platanioti/Despoina Solomou. Brazil’s Nayara Figueira and Lara Teixeira completed the ranking.