

Italy's Martina Grimaldi and Simone Ruffini win Grand Prix race in Cozumel

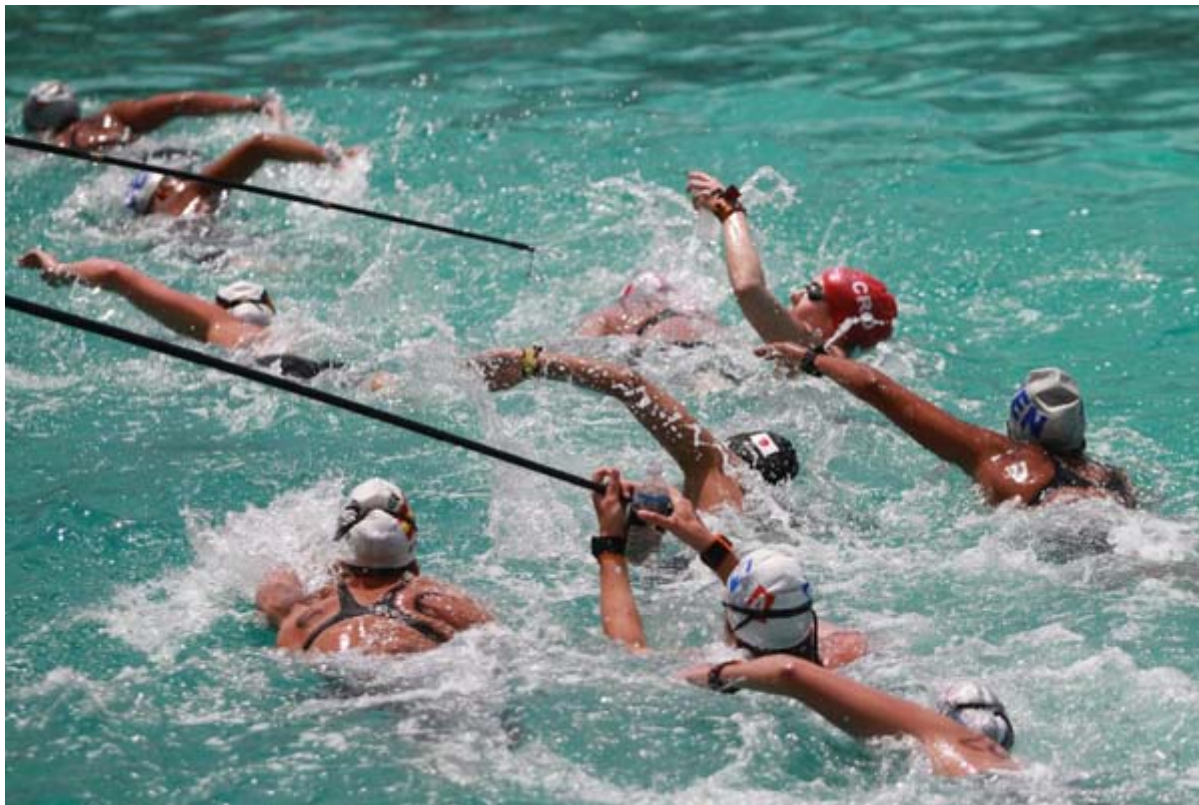
Claudia Ruiz, FINA Press Correspondent in Mexico

Under the sun of the Mexican Caribbean, Italy clearly dominated the operations, winning four medals out of the six on offer in the pristine waters of the Cozumel island, which hosted the Mexican leg of the FINA Open Water Swimming Grand Prix for the first time on April 20. A week after winning the 10km World Cup race in the same waters, Grimaldi took out the women's Grand Prix race, touching home in 3h21m44s2. The Olympic bronze medallist was closely followed by Angela Maurer (GER), who took second in a time of 3h21m47s9 while compatriot Rachele Bruni claimed the bronze in 3h21m55s2.

The three women stayed close to the men's pack for the entire race, in an awesome display of strength and endurance. Post-race, Grimaldi said: "It was a tough race, but I'm very happy, my dream was to win again in Cozumel."

"Cozumel is one of the toughest races, you need to be well prepared physically and mentally to complete, especially when you feel the strong currents," she added.

The men's race was also a hard-fought one. Italy's Simone Ruffini achieved his best result at the FINA Grand Prix, touching first in 3h03m22s1. Ruffini faced pressure from Brian Ryckeman (BEL), second in 3h03m36s4 and teammate Simone Ercoli, third in 3h03m40s9.



Participants in the 15km race in Cozumel - *credit: Getty Images*

"Cozumel was my first win at a FINA Grand Prix so I'm very happy. My strategy to reach the goal and finish quickly was to stay close to the leader from the beginning, but the last lap was the hardest. At the end I was nervous because Ryckeman came very close," said Ruffini.

Speaking after the event, Ryckeman said: "It was a very fast race from the beginning, we clearly battled for the win, it was a great challenge."

Ercoli also reflected on his result: "It was a good competition, I prefer hot water, the pace was very fast."

Strong currents in the final part of the journey considerably tested the endurance of the competitors. In all, 70 participants (26 women and 44 men) from 21 countries took part in the Grand Prix race.
