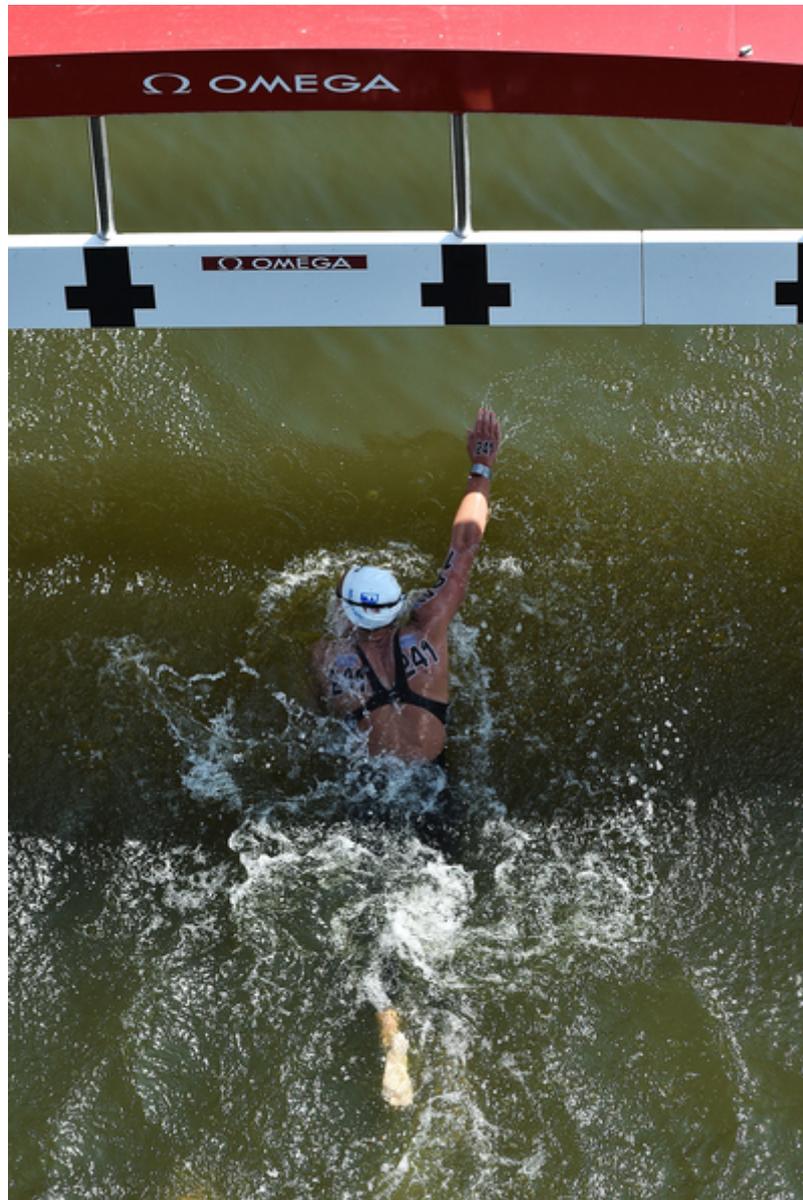


Muller gives France first Open Water gold

Greg Eggert, FINA Media Committee Member

Aurelie Muller of France became the first female open water swimmer to qualify for the 2016 Olympic Games winning the 10km event at the Kazan 2015 FINA World Championships in 1:58.04.3. Muller claims the first gold medal for France in open water swimming. France had previously won three silver medals and three bronze medals in open water events including Muller's silver medal in 2011 at the Shanghai Worlds. She finished 2.4 seconds ahead of her training partner Sharon Van Rouwendaal of The Netherlands under brilliant weather conditions and a pleasant air temperature of 26 degrees at the start of the race. Muller had a run of bad luck having missed qualification for the 2012 London Olympics. The French swimmer was disqualified at the finish line from the 10km in Roberval in 2010. She recalls a poor 1500m freestyle result because her goggles filled with water, failing to qualify for the 2011 Shanghai World Championships. In the 23 degree placid water of the Kazanka River her luck changed for the better. Pacing herself with an easy 30.33.9 first lap she stayed relaxed in the pack of swimmers, passing the 2.5km mark tied for 19th position. In her second of four laps she found herself leading her 54 challengers from 34 countries.



Aurelie Muller (FRA) ready to touch for the gold - *Photo credit: Giorgio Scala/Deepbluemia*

Muller's time at the 5km was 1:00.21.3, almost two seconds ahead of Hungary's Eva Risztov. The Magyar would stay with Muller for another lap but fell off the pace to finish 32.1 seconds behind the French swimmer. The Hungarian finished in 10th place and qualified for the Olympic Games. Muller kept up her pace leading by about two seconds over Italy's Rachele Bruni at the 7.5km mark. Bruni has won three 10km races this year but she fell off the pace, finishing 4th and is still without a world championship medal. A consolation is her qualification for the Olympic Games.

Today's silver medalist Rouwendaal won gold in 10km at the 2014 European Championships and earned a bronze medal in the 800m in Shanghai in 2011. She is the second woman to win medals in swimming and open water swimming following the USA's Haley Lewis who won five swimming and one open water medals between 1991 and 2001. She can give Netherlands a third gold medal in this event at the world championships, equalling Russia and Germany on most gold. Her programme in the pool starts on Sunday with the 400m freestyle and also includes the 800m and 1500m freestyle events.

Capturing the bronze medal a distant 22.2 seconds behind the two European swimmers was Ana Marcela Cunha (BRA) in a time of 1:15.26.5. She was the silver medallist in the 2013 edition in Barcelona. Her teammate Poliana Okimoto finished in sixth place to qualify for the home Olympic Games to be held in Rio de Janeiro next year. Swimmers who finished in the top 10 places in today's race are the first qualifiers for next year's Olympic Marathon. Brazil was the only nation to qualify two athletes. As the host nation they

would have been automatically eligible for one swimmer, but any nation placing two in the top 10 would qualify both athletes.



Conditions in Kazan were perfect for the 10km event - *Photo credit: Giorgio Scala/Deepbluemedias*

Yesterday's Allan do Carmo from Brazil also qualified for his home Olympic Games joining Cunha and Okimoto who each qualified today. Also in the men's race, two Italian swimmers (Simone Ruffini and Federico Vanelli) punched their tickets to Rio and will be joined by today's 4th place finisher Bruni. The USA's Haley Anderson finished 9th place today and will be joined by the men's 10km champion Jordan Wilimovsky and 4th place finisher Sean Ryan. Only Brazil, Italy and the USA have qualified in Kazan three swimmers for the 2016 Olympic Marathon.

OFFICIAL RESULTS & OLYMPIC QUALIFIERS

1. 1:58.04.3 Aurelie Muller, FRA
2. 1:58.06.7 Sharon Van Rouwendaal, NED
3. 1:58.26.5 Ana Marcela Cunha, BRA
4. 1:58.27.9 Rachele Bruni, ITA
5. 1:58.28.6 Anastasiia Krapivina, RUS
6. 1:58.28.8 Poliana Okimoto Cintra, BRA
7. 1:58.30.0 Isabelle Franziska Harle, GER
8. 1:58.30.6 Kalliopi Araouzou, GRE
9. 1:58.35.9 Haley Anderson, USA
10. 1:58.36.4 Eva Risztov, HUN

QUOTES

Aurelie Muller (FRA, gold): "I am very happy with the gold medal and I am also happy for Sharon and Ana Marcela. It was a crazy race today. I took the lead so I would not encounter any fighting".

“This is my first world championships but it is very well organised. Sharon and I train together but I never beat her in training. Sharon also swims events in the pool but I don't, just open water races”.

“The race today was very easy in the first 5km. I was leading at the 7.5km point and it was still easy for me. So I left the group and said to myself, 'I am trying something and see where it goes!'”

Sharon Van Rouwendaal (NED, silver): “I'm very happy that I qualified for the Olympic Games because it was my goal to finish in the top 10. I saw that we were just three at the end and I thought maybe I could win a medal”.

“Aurelie and I train together in France under a great coach, Philippe Lucas; she arrived in February and I hope that we will train together until the Olympics. This is my first World Championships in open water and this event is so well organised! I am really enjoying it!”

“My programme in the pool begins on Sunday with the 400m freestyle. I will also swim the 800m and 1500m freestyle events”.

“I swam the 5km on Saturday and had two days rest. I thought I recovered very well but my legs did not feel very fresh so maybe if I didn't swim the 5km... but we won't know that. In the 5km my strategy was to swim in the front because I didn't want to get hit. In the last 500m of the 5km I thought I would be ok to make a move to the front but my legs were not there and I arrived in 4th place. For the 10km my coach and I had a different strategy where I would save my energy for a strong finish and today's plan worked”.

Ana Marcela Cunha (BRA, bronze): “I am very satisfied, not because I won a bronze medal but because I finished in the top 10 and have qualified for the Olympics. It was a crazy race, I was in 6th or 7th and I am not sure who I passed on the way to the finish. I'm pleased because I have been training for seven years for this moment. Four years ago, I finished 11th in Shanghai and I narrowly missed the qualification for the London Olympics”.
