

HDWCup 2016: Quartet of aces rules the game on Day 1

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If this was supposed to be the appetizer, one must wonder how the main plate will be! After the first session of the third edition of the FINA High Diving World Cup, taking place in Abu Dhabi (UAE) from February 27-29, an impressive set of performances opened in the best possible way the competition. After the two rounds of dives from the 27m platform, a notable quartet leads the operations: the medallists at the 2015 FINA World Championships, namely Gary Hunt (GBR), Jonathan Paredes (competing under the FINA flag) and Artem Silchenko (RUS), but also the icon of this discipline, Colombia's Orlando Duque.

For Hunt, it has been two flawless dives for a total of 228.70 points and the provisional lead of the ranking. "I dived the best I could dive and there are two other athletes who are a couple of points behind. That's really incredible!" confessed the Brit star, known for his perfect execution and for setting the bar high concerning the introduction of new combinations. However, for the decisive day - on February 29, when three rounds of dives will be on the programme -, the current world champion will maintain his Kazan 2015 programme. "I hope to have the same success than in Kazan. The level here is very high, as it is the first competition of the year", he says. But, he immediately warns: "Today, we had dives with limited DD [degree of difficult]. On Monday, with optional dives, everything can change?" On Day 1, he never got under 9.0 from the judges, proving that the best is yet to come!

Jonathan Paredes - Photo by Giorgio Scala/Deepbluemedias

Jonathan Paredes, silver medallist in Kazan 2015, is also determined to shine in Abu Dhabi. After an already very solid first attempt, he was simply divine in his second combination - a forward 3 somersaults ½ twist, in the free position -, getting two perfect 10 from the judges!

"After Kazan, this is the first FINA competition of the year, and we all have some pressure to perform well. In my case, I have a silver medal to defend and I hope that on Monday I can not only repeat it, but who knows, still improve it. I will do the same programme as in Kazan, and I hope to continue serene and performing well. As we are starting a new year, I didn't want to be stressed and present new dives, so I will just need to perform the ones I know well in a perfect way. Can I take the gold? Well, maybe if we make Gary to disappear?", Paredes jokes.

Tied in second after this first session, Artem Silchenko collected 225.15 points from the judges and also presented a notable pair of dives, never noted under 9.0. Bronze medallist at home, at the Kazan 2015 FINA World Championships last summer, the Russian star was even surprised with his level of performances. "I have done one of the best dives in my life! But Gary is still in the lead? Today, it was totally crazy! I hope to do better than in Kazan, but Gary is an incredible diver, and he confirmed it once more today. Paredes was also super good today? But, I can beat them!?"

The third best combined score of the day came from Orlando Duque, the 41-year-old Colombian legend,

who will start the decisive day in the fourth position.

“The level is steadily improving. We have a growing number of divers present here, and we even see that the new ones are dealing OK with the pressure and performing well”, he recognises. First world champion in 2013 and winner of the first two editions of the World Cup (2014, Kazan; 2015, Cozumel), Duque believes that he has good chances to get to the podium. “Of course! The idea is to bring a medal from here, and even the victory is still possible. The competition on Monday will be very open and everything can happen”, he concludes. At the 2015 FINA World Championships, the Colombian star couldn’t reach the podium and finished sixth.

Besides this quartet of aces, the only other diver with a FINA medal – two bronze from the previous World Cups –, US Steve LoBue is for now in seventh (185.65). Between him and Duque, Andy Jones (USA) is fifth and Kris Kolanus (POL) is sixth – both of them are quite close to the Colombian, with 200.10 points each. Jones’ best result so far was also a fifth position at the Kazan Worlds, while Kolanus’ highlight is an eighth rank in Barcelona 2013.

The beauty of High Diving - Photo by Giorgio Scala/Deepbluemedi

A total of 26 male divers started the competition in Abu Dhabi, a significant improvement compared with the past four FINA competitions: 13 athletes in Barcelona 2013, 21 in Kazan 2014 (World Cup), 21 in Cozumel 2015 (World Cup) and 20 in Kazan 2015. On February 28, the women’s competition will take place, with 10 divers taking the plunge from the 20m-platform.
