

HDWCup 2016: Lysanne Richard (CAN) gets surprising gold

Pedro Adrega, Head of FINA Communications Department

In a competition marked by plenty of surprises, the women's podium of the third FINA High Diving World Cup was an unexpected one. In Abu Dhabi (UAE), 10 athletes, including the 2015 FINA World Championships medallists, took part in the three-round final held under good natural conditions – sunny day, with a light breeze. In the end, Lysanne Richard (CAN) took the gold with 253.80 points, being followed by Helena Merten (AUS, silver, 229.60) and by Ginger Huber (USA, bronze, 209.85).

And how many of these competitors had been on the podium last summer in Kazan? None. In fact, the best three in the capital of Tatarstan had modest performances in the United Arab Emirates. Firstly, Rachelle Simpson (USA) was clearly the athlete to beat, holding the two major titles of 2015 – World Championships and World Cup. And it wasn't necessary to wait too long to see that the US star was not in the best of her shape. From the initial dive, a forward 3 somersaults ½ twist (pike, DD 2.6) it was notorious that it wasn't Simpson's day. Missing her entry (over rotation), Simpson only gets marks from 6.0 to 7.0. Her second attempt is slightly better (DD 3.8, notes between 7.5/8.0), but her last combination (DD 4.0) was disastrous, with an entry clearly bent on the chest (marks: 3.5/4.5). It was the end of Simpson's hopes, and the eighth position in the ranking, a result that was certainly not part of her plans.

“I don't want to find excuses, but I have at the moment a double injury – in my back and in my hip. I was in pain throughout the entire final”, confessed the 2014 and 2015 FINA Best Female High Diver of the Year. “However, I must recognise that the general level of the girls raised a lot and I am happy for the new ones on the podium – it shows that the sport is progressing well”, Simpson commented.

Before that, teammate Cesilie Carlton, first world champion in 2013 and silver medallist in 2015, wasn't much better, especially with the last of her dives. The outcome was a sixth position. Finally, Yana Nestsiarova (BLR), third at the Worlds in Kazan, had problems with the first attempt and ended up finishing in fifth.



Merten (AUS), Richard (CAN) and Huber (USA) - Photo by Giorgio Scala/Deepbluemedi

Very concentrated from the beginning of the final (attended by FINA President Dr. Julio C. Maglione), Canada's Lysanne Richard – ninth at the 2015 World Cup and fifth at the Kazan Worlds – performed very regularly, obtaining consistent marks from the judges. She hasn't made many mistakes and her last attempt, a forward 3 somersaults 1 ½ twists (pike, DD 4.0), was noted between 7.5 and 9.0 by the judges. It was a happy end for Richard, who was in the lead throughout the entire competition. From Montreal, the 34-year-old practiced some pool diving until the age of 14, but had to stop because of ear problems. Some years later, she started to work in acrobatic shows (she integrated the renowned group of the "Cirque du Soleil"), and the participation in cliff/high diving events came as a natural consequence.

"I worked a lot to be in excellent conditions here! I wanted to do the best, but it was difficult to predict the victory. Anyway, I think that I've improved a lot of things compared to 2015 and today I was rewarded for that", confessed this mother of three children. "I succeeded my entries very well, but I have to improve my starts. I will now work on two directions: to improve the dives that I already perform (and have already a good DD) and work on new dives", considered Richard. "Some months ago, I had an injury that obliged me to stop for a month, so I had to prepare not only my physical capacities but also my mental skills".

Totally new to the FINA high diving world, Helena Merten from Australia surprised everyone with the consistency and regularity of her dives. Gymnast and acrobat, she got in 2013 a contract with the show "House of Dancing Water" in Macao, China, where she presently resides. After her silver medal performance, she could hardly find the convenient words when speaking to media. "I tried to remain focused throughout the final and it paid off. I am new in this sport, but this result will certainly help to increase my

motivation for the future”, she said. When asked what she likes the most in this discipline, the reply is immediate: “I love the feeling of being free in the air, and then to understand I made a nice entry in the water”.

In the lowest march of the podium, Ginger Huber came back to her glory days, after getting the silver in Barcelona 2013 and again at the 2014 World Cup in Kazan. The 41-year-old veteran had a very good second dive and also impressed in the third dive, with a blind entry in the water. “I was feeling pretty good today – I miss some practice before coming to Abu Dhabi, so I could even do better!”
