

HDWCup 2016: Hunt him, if you can!

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There is the famous expression “you don’t change a team that is winning”. We could adapt it for High Diving and say that “you don’t change a programme that allows the victory at a World Championships”. Gary Hunt, from Great Britain, must have thought the same, and after replicating the programme of dives presented in Kazan 2015, he got once again the gold medal, this time in the third edition of the FINA High Diving World Cup, that concluded today in Abu Dhabi (UAE).

Like in the capital of Tatarstan last summer, the highlight of his five-dive programme was a 5268D combination, integrating a back 3 somersaults and 4 twists, for an impressive DD (degree of difficulty) of 6.2. Getting marks from 8.5/9.0, Hunt collected 158.10 for this dive, slightly worse than his performance in Kazan (161.20). “I wasn’t so happy with this dive, but I agree that it was important for the victory”, considered the Brit star, who finished the competition with an aggregated total of 639.30 points (exactly 10 points more than at the Worlds).

Also silver medallist in Russia, Jonathan Paredes (competing under the FINA flag) had another brilliant performance at World Cup level, also concluded in second, with 578.70 points. His good friend and mentor Orlando Duque (COL) was third in 572.15. For the Colombian legend it was the return to the FINA podiums, after winning the first three competitions, in Barcelona 2013 (World Championships), in Kazan 2014 (World Cup) and in Cozumel 2015 (World Cup).

After the 2015 World Championships it was said that, if performing at his best level, Gary Hunt is virtually unbeatable. In Abu Dhabi, he stole the show with flawless dives, always excellently noted by the judges. And if in the past, he was always a bit nervous in his last combination, he didn’t shake in the United Arab Emirates: he concluded his brilliant series with a DD 5.8 dive noted 8.5/9.0. This attempt had one particularity: it was executed with a running take-off.

“I am working on this specific matter, so I can have more possibilities in terms of integrating more elements in the air. I didn’t want to add a twist here in Abu Dhabi, but I am pretty close to do it. Until the next competition – in three months’ time – I will definitely be ready”, he considered.

Known for presenting extremely complex dives, the 2015 FINA Best Male High Diver of the Year has now perfected them and is by far the best of the field executing them. As an example, two other divers tried the already famous combination back 3 somersaults with 4 twists. Steve LoBue (USA) got 74.40, while his teammate Kyle Mitrione got 86.80. You still remember Hunt’s note? Well, 158.10...

Jonathan Paredes was also very solid in Abu Dhabi – second after the first session on Saturday (where two rounds of dives were presented) -, the 26-year-old was again quite regular in his last three attempts. His best dive was precisely the fifth one, a forward 3 somersaults 1 ½ twists (DD 4.9), for which he obtained an excellent 132.30. “Being again in the podium with Orlando is very special for me, given the great friendship

we have. Moreover, I repeated the silver from Kazan, which is an enormous satisfaction”, Paredes said. Asked if he and Gary should be placed on a different level in relation to the rest of the field, the reply was: “I don’t think that... We are doing the things in a constant and regular way, and this pays off. The main thing for us is the quality of the diving, comprising also the entry in the water. But, we must also enjoy the competition!” It was the first World Cup medal for Paredes, after being bronze medallist at the Barcelona 2013 Worlds and runner-up last year in Kazan.

Orlando Duque needs no presentation. He is a true icon of the discipline and was only absent from the podium last summer in Russia, when he finished sixth. At 41, the experienced high diver is very analytical when commenting his medal.

“We saw here a lot of divers (some of them not so used to do it) presenting very difficult combinations. This is of course good for the development of the discipline, but is perhaps not very appropriate if you want to get a good result. By order, the priority must be: entry in the water (safety), quality of the dive, and then eventually the victory. You cannot ‘burn’ some steps”, said the Colombian great. “After Day 1 [when he finished fourth], I felt very tired, but today I was regular enough to get the bronze”, admitted Duque.

In fact, he could benefit from a final mistake from Artem Silchenko (RUS), in his fifth and last dive. Third in Kazan last summer, the Russian champion badly missed his last combination, a complex armstand back 2 ½ somersaults 2 ½ twists, for a DD of 6.3. Silchenko missed the entry and, from the second position, he concluded in seventh.
