

From Hunt(er) to Hunt(ed)

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When your family name is “Hunt” and you are a high diving star, journalists are happy. They can do nice titles with it, sport being essentially a hunting strategy, the weakest trying to chase the strongest ones, and the champions continuously avoiding being captured. But besides playing with the words, this could be the quick definition of Gary Hunt’s career over the last years. The 31-year-old British star was for a couple of years the “Hunter”, but became the most “Hunted” athlete of the discipline since 2015.

After waiting for two seasons, he had finally his stellar season last year. Winner of the gold medal at the 2015 FINA World Championships in Kazan (RUS), the British star could eventually surpass the undisputable legend of the discipline, Colombia’s Orlando Duque. In the capital of Tatarstan, Hunt finally proved that when perfectly executing his dives, he is virtually unbeatable, as he normally integrates in his programme the dives with the highest Degree of Difficulty of the entire field. That was also a reality here in Abu Dhabi (UAE), where he impressively (and comfortably) got the 2016 FINA High Diving World Cup title.

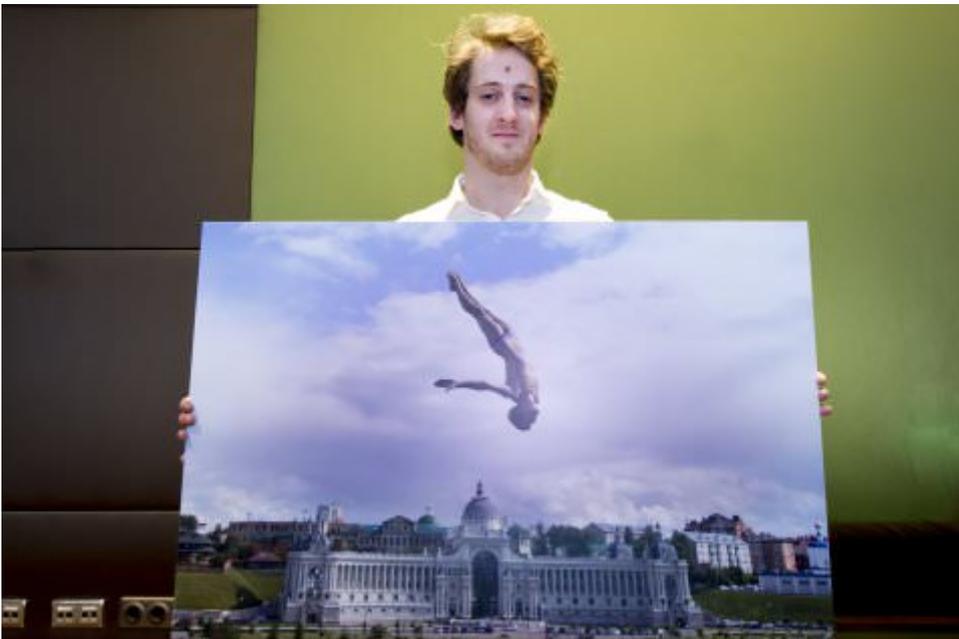


Photo by Giorgio Scala/Deepbluemedi

Going back to 2013 (FINA World Championships in Barcelona, Spain) and 2014 (FINA World Cup, also in Kazan), Hunt repeatedly praised the regularity of his main opponent (Duque, winner on the two occasions), while he also recognised that the high risks of his dives were sometimes synonym of mistakes. This was even more evident at the 2015 edition of the World Cup, in Cozumel (MEX), when Hunt couldn't even make the podium, finishing in a disappointing fourth place.

After three consecutive victories, Duque was the man to beat in Kazan, but this time things went the opposite way: the Colombian great made some mistakes (and finished in a “modest” sixth place), while Hunt did it perfectly from the very first dive to the fifth and last combination. The key for success was his amazing third attempt, a 5268B (back 3 somersaults with 4 twists, in the pike position), which has an impressive DD of 6.2: his flawless executive generated a massive score of 161.20, a performance that was truly decisive for the outcome of the competition.

In the United Arab Emirates, he repeated the same dive (but in the free position, for the same DD of 6.2) and was slightly worse, amassing 158.10. Any athlete in his position would be happy: however, Hunt said in the post-event media interview that he wasn't satisfied with the way he executed this combination at the World Cup. Gary is like that: hunting perfection in whatever he does.

When speaking and listening to this great athlete, there is a sort of contradiction between the humble, calm and patient man behind the microphone and the diver that constantly pushes further the boundaries of this discipline, a kind of daredevil that has apparently no fear. His reply to that: “There are no limits in high diving, the harder you work, the more you realise what you are capable of”. And he adds: “I don't really consider myself a risk taker. It may look like we are crazy to jump from these heights but everything is calculated”.

Anyway, after getting also in 2015 the fifth title in the Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series (in which he was present since 2009 in every 50 legs of the circuit so far), Gary Hunt promises to further progress in 2016 with even harder drives (he is the one of the few athletes in the high diving world daring to make running take-off dives from the 27m platform and will definitively take advantage from that). He likes the challenges, and is ready to work for them.

He also clearly admits that High Diving has potential and qualities to be one day an Olympic event. In 2014, in a previous interview to FINA, he had considered: “Sports that make you say ‘wow’ are always going to do well. Lots of people have jumped into the sea from the rocks. Often people will boast about the heights that they have jumped but nobody can imagine jumping from as high as we jump”. Hunt knows what he is talking about: with his astonishing performances and dives, he certainly is in the list of those that can amaze the world and definitively further popularise the sport he loves.
