

Xin Xin (CHN) wins women's qualification in Setúbal

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Xin Xin (CHN), Keri-Anne Payne (GBR) and Samantha Arevalo (ECU) were the medallists at the women's event of the FINA Marathon Swimming Olympic Games Qualification Tournament, taking place in Setúbal (POR) on June 11, 2016. These three athletes led a wider group of 15 athletes that qualified for the Rio 2016 and joined the 10 other swimmers that had been selected at the 2015 FINA World Championships in Kazan (RUS).

The race started with 48 swimmers under a sunny and warm day (27°C) and a water temperature of 19°C. The group swam packed for a while, with the second Chinese of the field – Siyu Yan – leading the operations for the first two loops. In the third split, Yan was seventh, while Xin was 14th and then roles switched. The 19-year-old from the city of Jinan then applied a decisive acceleration, clearly spotting the Olympic qualification. In the end, she was the fastest in Setúbal, concluding in 1h55m12s1.



Xin Xin (CHN) - Photo by Jose Lorvao

“We didn't have a special tactics for this race. Things happened like that. I am very happy with the outcome of the event”, declared Xin, who felt a “bit cold” in the water. Training in both her native city and with the national team in Beijing, Xin Xin avoids setting high expectations for Rio. “You know, there were already 10 qualified athletes from Kazan. I am theoretically the 11th best of the field. My goal in Brazil is to improve this ranking”.

If Xin Xin is relatively unknown in the open water world, Keri-Anne Payne, from Great Britain, is an

experienced and successful athlete. Silver medallist in the inaugural 10km marathon swimming at the 2008 Games in Beijing (CHN), she finished in a disappointing fourth place four years ago, at home, in London. Always in the leading group – her worse split was ninth – she couldn't get Xin in the final metres, but was rather satisfied with her performance (silver in 1h55m12s9).

“Basically, I've tried to keep an eye on everyone else during the race and tried to preserve the maximum energy towards the end. The competition conditions were fine – we were a bit afraid of the cold temperature of the water, but at the end it was OK”, considered the 28-year-old star. Looking at Rio, she smiles and confesses: “Anything good there will be a bonus! After London, I went on doing so many other things and I took a lot of pleasure doing them.”



Keri-Anne Payne (GBR) - Photo by Jose Lorvao

Being a top-athlete already with a medal from Beijing 2008, Keri-Anne is in a good position to evaluate the evolution of marathon swimming since the Olympic debut. “It has been amazing. At Beijing time, it was a kind of unknown discipline; when I swam four years ago in Hyde Park, we had 30'000 spectators cheering for us. This shows how things evolved and I am proud of being an athlete that helped on these developments”, she concludes.

The bronze medal (1h55m15s9) went to Samantha Arevalo, who became the first female athlete from her country to qualify for an Olympic marathon swimming event. “I really hope that this will open a new era in my country. I finished 12th in Kazan, so I was a bit disappointed, but we prepared hard for this event and things paid off”, concedes Arevalo, born in September 1994. She had been already an Olympian in 2012, when she participated in the women's 800m free in the London Aquatics Centre.

The list of the remaining qualifiers in Setúbal did not present special surprises, but rather some disappointment for some pool swimmers. From Chile, Kristel Kobrich, also a long-distance specialist in the pool concluded in 23rd, while Spanish star Mireia Belmonte (qualified for four pool events in Rio) was even slower, touching in the 28th position. After the direct qualification – the 10 first of the ranking, with the condition of a maximum of one athlete per country -, the continental selection resulted in five additional places for Spain (Europe), Canada (Americas), Malaysia (Asia), New Zealand (Oceania) and Egypt (Africa).

