

High Diving: Gary Hunt (GBR) unstoppable in Abu Dhabi

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Gary Hunt, from Great Britain, confirmed his favourite status at the 4th FINA High Diving World Cup in Abu Dhabi (UAE), by winning the competition in an impressive total score of 443.40 points. The last dive (back 3 somersaults and 4 twists) of the British star was unforgettable, and thanks to a flawless execution he amassed 140.40, including a perfect 10 from the judges. Hunt was the 2016 winner of this event and is also the reigning world champion since Kazan 2015.

Thanks to his technique and quality of execution, the World Cup gold medallist seems to be one step above the rest of the field. “That’s a big compliment. To reach this level of consistency it’s both flattering and important for me”, considered Hunt at the end of the two-day competition. Already in the lead of the competition after Day 1, when he tried a new dive (a complicated front 3 somersaults, 4 ½ twists), the British great did not shake in the final day, performing two last dives that were well appreciated by the judges (notes from 8.5 and above in both cases). “The secret? Just training, there isn’t anything else. Work, work, and again work. Fortunately, the nerves didn’t affect me much, so I could finish strong, in a competition where the level was quite high”, he admitted.

Gary Hunt will definitively be the man to beat at the upcoming FINA World Championships, to be held next July in Budapest (HUN). “The job is done, I can now relax. I am glad to be on the top one more time, but the season is far from being over. The Worlds are coming soon and this is definitively a good motivation to perform well in Budapest”, he concluded.

The minor medals went to US Steve Lobue (silver in 405.30) and to Michal Navratil, from Czech Republic (bronze in 381.95). The North American diver was also very regular here in Abu Dhabi, confirming his second provisional place after Day 1. At the conclusion of this World Cup, he performed two more solid dives, namely an inward 4 somersaults with ½ twist, worth 112.20. This wasn’t the first podium presence for Lobue in a FINA event, after the bronze at the 2014 and 2015 World Cup in Kazan (RUS) and Cozumel (MEX), respectively.

For Navratil (also third after Day 1), this is the first success at this level, after his best ever placing in a FINA event, fourth at the 2013 Worlds in Barcelona (ESP). The Czech diver was particularly successful in the first dive of the final day (marks between 8.5 and 9.5), but the optional dive (without DD limit) was also well noted by the judges (8.0/9.0).

Jimenez confirms leadership

In the women’s field, the leader of Day 1 also confirmed her credentials and got the gold in Abu Dhabi. Adriana Jimenez was also the champion of regularity in the capital of the United Arab Emirates, winning in 316.45. Her weakest dive of the two-day competition was precisely the last one (a challenging reverse 3 somersaults), but the advance she had before that final round was enough to ensure the victory.

“I’m dreaming about this success for 2/3 years now. I just can’t believe! I am so happy and relieved...”, said the 32-year-old Mexican after her winning effort at the Yas Island venue. “I am also thrilled that the competition went well. Everyone is safe and we all loved being here. You know, in high diving we are a big family, we take care of each other”, she confessed. “This gold medal is also the result of my country’s and my friends’ support for all these years. Things haven’t been always easy, but today is a day to celebrate”, concluded Jimenez, who got her first medal in a FINA competition.

Also a novelty at this level was the silver medal for Rhiannan Iffland (AUS), in a total of 312.80 points. The Australian had been only 10th last year also in Abu Dhabi, but is progressing quickly and will be one name to retain in the future. The bronze went to Belarus’ Yana Nestsiarava, who completed her four-dive competition in 296.80. Her biggest feat until now had been also a third place at the 2015 FINA World Championships in Kazan (RUS).

The biggest (negative) surprise of the competition was Canada’s Lysanne Richard, winner in 2016. “I had two less good days, especially yesterday. I know I have the level to fight for the medals, but this wasn’t my competition. I was not ‘there’, or maybe I haven’t progressed so much as the others...”, she confessed. On the effects for the Worlds in Budapest, Richard smiles and admits: “On the contrary, I want to take revenge there. Obviously not against the others – all the girls dove very well – but essentially against myself. I will come back in Hungary!”
