

Superstitious Le Clos takes a step closer to SWC title in Tokyo

David Hulmes, FINA Press Correspondent in Japan

Chad le Clos (RSA) and Sarah Sjöström (SWE) took another big step towards claiming the overall titles of the FINA/airweave Swimming World Cup, during Tuesday's opening night of the Tokyo leg. Meanwhile Daiya Seto (JPN) posted a World Cup record 1:51.40 in the 200m IM, lowering compatriot Kosuke Hagino's mark by 0.13 sec.

Le Clos (360 points) had a 123-point advantage over second-placed Vladimir Morozov (RUS) on arriving in Tokyo, and had stretched that before the end of the night.

Morozov downed Le Clos in the 100m free, touching home in 45.65, before the South African gained his revenge in the 50m fly, clocking 22.49, with the Russian trailing home fifth.



Chad Le Clos (RSA)

“I was nervous a bit for the 50m fly because it was the 27th consecutive win in that event at the World Cup, and no-one's done that before,” said Le Clos.

“Also, 27 is my dad’s unlucky number — even though he was born on the 27th, it’s a weird thing for him — so I thought I was going to get disqualified, or go too fast and mess it up, but that’s me done for the year in that event. Next year I’ll go into the 50m fly undefeated and see where it goes.

“In fact, it’s 30 races unbeaten with the world champs. It’s going to be close for the cluster with Vladimir, but hopefully — and I don’t really want to say it — something would have to go really wrong for me to lose the overall title. Still, I want to win the cluster too.”

Sjostrom touched home first in the 50m fly, ahead of Ranomi Kromowidjojo (NED), while third-placed Japanese teen queen Rikako Ikee (25.14) lowered her own world junior record of 25.73.



Rikako Ikee (JPN) in the mixed zone

The Swede then doubled up in the 200m free with what appeared a facile success in 1:52.94, with Cate Campbell (AUS) 1.75sec behind in second.

Looks, however, can be deceptive, according to Sjostrom.



Sarah Sjöström (SWE)

“I’m taking one event at a time like always, but the 200m free felt really tough. I just wanted to recover after the 50m fly and I didn’t really get the right feeling in the free — I was just trying to win the event and that’s it. Two events a day feels enough for me!,” she joked.

Sjöström came into the meet with 515 points, 111 ahead of Katinka Hosszu (HUN), and extended that lead as the self-styled Iron Lady won her only event, the 400m IM, in 4:22.05.

Emily Seebohm (AUS) put more points on the board in the race for third, with victory in the 50m back, stopping the clock in 26.24. The Aussie lay fourth with 210 points at the start of the night, just 17 behind Kromowidjojo.

“I’m just doing it for fun, not the money, and getting a lot of racing. Racing short course is good for my technique and skills when I go back to long-course races,” said Seebohm.

Her partner, Mitch Larkin (AUS), has been a regular at the Tokyo leg in recent years, but has a more important task on his hands.

“We moved in together a week last Friday, so he’s back home, keeping the place tidy I hope — but he’s a boy, so who knows?”

Yasuhiro Koseki (JPN) gave the home fans something to cheer when he beat Kirill Prigoda (RUS) — third in the overall standings before racing — in the opening race of the night, the 100m breast.

The men's and women's series winners take home \$150,000 each, runners-up \$100,000, and third-place finishers \$50,000, following a prize-money increase announced by FINA in September.

An additional boost sees each overall cluster winner collect \$50,000, with eighth place the last spot to be rewarded (\$3,000).

This third and final cluster began in Beijing last week and, after the Tokyo leg concludes on Wednesday, the action moves on to the overall series finale in Singapore this weekend.
