

Records tumble in Tokyo as Le Clos and Sjostrom edge closer to SWC titles

David Hulmes, FINA Press Correspondent in Japan

Two World Cup records and three world junior records fell on the final night of the Tokyo leg of the FINA/airweave Swimming World Cup, on Wednesday.

Sarah Sjostrom (SWE) and Daiya Seto (JPN) set competition bests, while teen ace Rikako Ikee (JPN) lowered two of her own world junior marks and Bingjie Li (CHN) claimed one in the 400m free.

Sjostrom's performances pushed her within touching distance of the overall title, while Chad Le Clos (RSA) laid one hand on the men's crown, even though both suffered setbacks.

The Swede clocked 55.07sec in the 100m fly, lowering the four-year-old World Cup record of 55.30 set by Alicia Coutts (AUS), with runner-up Ikee taking her world junior standard down by 0.43sec to 55.99.

Sjostrom was, however, edged out in the 50m free by Ranomi Kromowidjojo (NED), who stopped the clock at 23.29, just ahead of the Swede in 23.34.



“I’m very happy with my 100 fly, it was not a perfect race at all — I swam the 50m free OK just before that. I still have a lot of things to work on. I can still improve my swimming and details a lot — I make a lot of mistakes in my races and I can still improve,” said Sjostrom.

Katinka Hosszu (HUN) claimed the 250th gold of her World Cup career when winning the first race of the night, the 100m IM. She came home in 57.38, ahead of Ikee — who sliced 0.49sec off another of her world junior bests, this time to 57.75 — and arch-rival Emily Seebohm (AUS).

“I was confident in each race and that was the key to breaking the records. I will miss my junior days, but to get a medal at the Olympics in 2020 I will have to do enough training to compete with similar and older athletes. This summer I did not get the results I was hoping for, but I hope next year I will not experience the same regret and so I will keep doing my best,” said Ikee.

Seebohm and Hosszu locked horns again in the 200m back, and the Aussie gained revenge, eventually pulling back long-time leader Regan Smith (USA) in a thrilling duel over the final 50m, with Hosszu back in third.

“That’s the way I’ve been swimming my 200s for a while now. It really helps me a lot and, especially with that 100 IM so close I really wanted to save as much as I could the first half. I’ll go to Singapore now, and it’s one step closer to going home, which is always nice. I guess it’s been a long six months and I’m ready to relax a bit before getting back in shape for the Commonwealth Games,” said Seebohm.

Sjostrom came into the meet with 515 points, 111 ahead of Hosszu, with Seebohm fourth on 210, just 17

behind Kromowidjojo.

Le Clos set a breakneck pace in the 200m fly, clocking 0.25 and 0.26 below world record standard at the 50m and 100m, before dropping off to touch home in 1:50.71, only 0.66 ahead of Nao Horomura (CLB).

He then had to play second fiddle to Cameron McEvoy (AUS) in the 200m free.

“I really wanted to go for it tonight, but it felt weird. Cameron attacked and good luck to him. I’d love to win them all, but that was a good race. I’ve got to do a bit better now in Singapore and be a bit more consistent in that middle 75 — it’s a bit of a grey area. It’s the toughest night in a while, but it’s been a good two days,” said Le Clos.

McEvoy clocked 1:43.37 and Le Clos was 0.19 behind.

“I came here after a very heavy workload, without freshening up, Beijing was a bit of a rattle to the system last week. I feel like I’ve come on a bit between then and now — winning the 200m is pretty good and the time is respectable for the condition I’m in. Chad’s got a great record so it’s cool to beat him, but he’s had a pretty respectable week,” said McEvoy.

Le Clos (360 points) had a 123-point advantage over Vladimir Morozov (RUS) on arriving in Tokyo, and with the Russian managing only third in his sole race on Wednesday, the series title is the South African’s in all but name.



Yulia Efimova (RUS)

Japan’s Seto had set the 400m IM World Cup standard in Beijing last week, and was at it again, lowering the mark a further 0.54 to 3:58.20.

“I have improved my breakout. Beijing was seven kicks under water, and today was six. I focused more on trying not to kill the speed. I was in Australia last month, two weeks in Gold Coast and five days competing in Adelaide. I learned about the breakout in Australia but I forgot in Beijing. I want to concentrate on the quality, not quantity, of races this year.

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.

A rise in cluster prize-money sees the winner collect \$50,000. with eighth place the last spot to be rewarded (\$3,000).



The third and final cluster began in Beijing last week, and the action now moves on to the overall series finale in Singapore this weekend.
