

Aquatics review of 2017: Open Water

Greg Eggert, FINA Media Committee Honorary Secretary

The world's best open water swimmers traversed the globe in 2017 meeting up to race each other in beautiful but challenging bodies of water across four continents. These swimmers dutifully follow the black line on the bottom of the pool on weekdays. These same aquatic adventurers know no boundaries as they test their own limits on the weekends. They meet to race each other on weekends, outside and facing the ever-changing elements, staking championship claims that come with prize money, sponsorships and a higher step on the podium.

FINA chronicled their exploits and accomplishments throughout the 2017 campaign and took note of the rivalries and also the teamwork that defined these exceptional performances of the past year.

Cunha made the headlines again



Ana Marcela Cunha of Brazil is one of the finest examples of excellence and consistency within the aquatic family. Cunha, a member of the Brazilian Navy, was present and wearing a brilliant white military uniform in Sanya, China, last December where she was recognised as the Best Open Water Female Swimmer of the Year.

Cunha earned three medals at the Budapest 2017 World Championships: gold in 25km, bronze in 5km and 10km. She is the best Brazilian open water swimmer in history and the one with the most medals at the FINA World Championships across all aquatic disciplines from her country. Cunha has now been Best Open Water Female Swimmer of the Year four times in the award's eight editions, having also won in 2010, 2014

and 2015.

She has won nine medals, 3 gold, 3 silver and 3 bronze at the FINA World Championships plus one bronze at the inaugural FINA World Open Water Swimming Championships in 2010. In the same year she claimed the overall title in the 10km World Cup series to earn her first "Best Athlete" recognition. In 2014 she was again the 10km World Cup champion. In 2015 at the World Championships in Kazan she won the 25km. Along with her team-mates she earned a silver medal in the 5km team event and she collected a bronze medal in the 10km.



The Brazilian world champion, however, has never reached an Olympic podium. In Beijing 2008 she was 5th, she missed qualification for the 2012 London Games, and in her home country she finished 10th in the 2016 Rio Olympics.

"I don't make long-term plans for my career. I like to go step by step, year after year, race after race. It's still very early to know what will happen until the Tokyo 2020 Games," Cunha said.

Cunha is the only female athlete to have won three 25km titles, a feat she achieved in 2011, 2015 and 2017.

"Many people ask what I think during a 25km event, which is normally more than five hours. The answer is simple: I just empty my mind and concentrate on the important aspects of the race," she said.

Cunha is consistently ranked in the top positions of the FINA 10km Marathon Swimming World Cup. She won the series in 2010, 2012 and 2014 and finished second in 2017

New intensity for Olivier



Marc-Antoine Olivier is the best French male open water swimmer in history, having earned three medals at the FINA World Championships and one at the Olympic Games.

Last summer he won three medals at the World Championships: gold in the 5km and team relay and bronze in the 10km. He competed in his first Olympics in 2016 at the age of 20, capturing bronze in the 10km on Rio's Copacabana Beach.

Olivier contested his first World Championships in Kazan in 2015: he was sixth in the 10km, achieving qualification for the Rio Olympics.

Since 2015, Olivier has stood on the 10km World Cup podium on two occasions, claiming a silver in Nouméa (FRA) in 2015 and a gold in Abu Dhabi (UAE) in 2016.

He is trained by Philippe Lucas, who has coached French Olympic champion Laure Manaudou, as well as open water swimmers Aurélie Muller of France and Sharon van Rouwendaal, the 2016 Olympic champion from the Netherlands.



"The intensity of training with Philippe Lucas is really different from what I was used to. Morning and afternoon, day in and day out, he asks for an intensity that you can't find anywhere else. But that's what I was looking for to reach that level. There is no secret, you have to work hard," Olivier said.

"In France, open water was a lot less professional than it is now. Before, we would kind of go to a meet and figure it out as we went. I think we had good swimmers then but not the right things put in place for preparation, recovery or nutrition, so the results just weren't there."

Before Olivier, the last medals for French male open water swimmers at the FINA World Championships were earned 16 years earlier, a silver for Stephan Gomez and bronze for Stephan Lecat in the 25km event at the Fukuoka edition in 2001.

Vive la France!

The waters of Lake Balaton were the scene of a gold rush by French open water swimmers at last summer's Worlds.



With his victory in the 25km, Axel Raymond claimed the fourth world championship title for the French team over six days of competition.

Reymond's gold followed the wins of Muller in the women's 10km, Olivier in the men's 5km and the quartet of Olivier, Muller, Oceane Cassagnol and Logan Fontaine in the mixed 5km team event. France also earned a silver from Muller in the 5km and a bronze from Olivier in the 10km, making it six medals in just seven races.

That haul of four golds, one silver and one bronze made France the strongest team in Balaton in a ranking of world championship medals powered by the efforts of Muller, Olivier and Reymond.

In terms of points, Italy won the World Championship Trophy with 133 points, followed by France (120), the USA (97), Brazil (63) and the Netherlands (50).

Multiple medal winners were Muller (2 gold, 1 silver), Olivier (1 gold, 1 bronze), Ashley Twichell of the USA (1 gold, 1 silver), Cunha (1 gold, 2 bronze), Jordan Wilimovsky of the USA (2 silver) and Italians

Mario Sanzulo (1 silver, 1 bronze) and Arianna Bridi (2 bronze).

The full length article is available in the latest issue of the FINA Magazine
