

Surrey Day 3: Inui wins solo free and duet free; Yakhno bags 8th medal in Canada

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(SURREY, British Columbia) – On Day 3 of the FINA World Series in Surrey, Yukiko Inui of Japan gave a commanding performance in solo free event to outscore her closest competitor all week (Yelyzaveta Yakhno of the Ukraine) and, as expected, clinch both solo golds in Canada.

Inui and Kanami Nakamaki came back an hour later to win the free duet, beating runners-up Yakhno and Anastasiya Savchuk which meant that Inui had also claimed both gold medals in duet (although she performed the technical portion with a new partner, Megumu Yoshida).

In the final event, the team highlight (which featured 10 athletes instead of eight), Ukraine's innovative quickstep routine beat France's can-can program for gold.

When Ukraine's music ended, Yakhno had contested eight of the nine events in Surrey – all but the mixed duet – and won medals in each (four gold, four silver). To put the rigors of that into perspective, Yakhno spent a full 23 minutes, 10 seconds in intense competition – with very little recovery time because the schedule was so tightly packed that only a few minutes separated each event. Asked to explain the effort to a layperson, two club swimmers from Quebec said a single routine would be like running a kilometer – at full speed – mostly upside down, holding your breath, muscles burning. While smiling. And trying to make it look easy.

So multiply that times eight...plus the brain power it takes to memorize eight routines.

Yet Yakhno, 19, didn't look even depleted – which is fortunate because she has a birthday to celebrate on Monday.



Yakhno winning medal No. 6 of 8. Photo (c) Anna Davydova

SOLO FREE

In the solo free final, no one made the podium with less than 90 points.

Yukiko Inui won gold by fully inhabiting the role of Ondine, a fairy princess falling in love. In addition to displaying incredible height and clean lines, Inui's expressions could be read from her fingertips to her face.

"I really felt like the character," Inui said afterwards.

Inui's coach, Masayo Imura, smiled but said the performance "needs more power."

Yelyzaveta Yakhno of the Ukraine earned the silver to claim her sixth medal – with two finals remaining.

Asked how she achieved success in so many disciplines, Yakhno said, "I think I'm strong sportswoman and I'm so artistic." What she didn't mention was that she trains eight hours a day in the pool, and two more hours daily on dry land.

Jacqueline Simoneau of Canada earned the bronze with a routine that had been originally choreographed by three-time world champion and Olympic medalist Virginie Dedieu of France. But Simoneau had polished and tweaked it over the years and said, "It went quite well. I'm proud of my performance."

"I liked how unpredictable it was," Simoneau added, explaining that she had only trained it three times in the past few weeks because Canada's national team was decentralized this year, so when the athletes recently convened for a one-month training camp, she said "all the focus goes on the team." But she didn't mind.

Instead, "I lived through my choreography," she said.



Inui and Nakamaki win free duet. Photo by (c) Anna Davydova

DUET FREE

In the free duet, after scoring 92.933 for the gold medal with a routine that portrayed leaping through time in four sections, Yukiko Inui said that what she and Kanami Nakamaki did well on Saturday was "fast and strong movement. But we need to be higher. Overall," Inui said, "it was normal but we could do better."

Silver medalists Yelyzaveta Yakhno and Anastasiya Savchuk came backstage after scoring 91.6333 and said their coach had just told them "we made many mistakes in our program. We must fix. But," Yakhno added, "we are very happy because we work very hard."

Canada claimed the bronze medal with an Inukshuk-themed program that scored 89.5667 points. Inukshuk are human-shaped stone markers developed by indigenous people in the Canadian arctic. (It was also the emblem of the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Winter Games.)

"It's a brand new routine for us this year," said Claudia Holzner who competed with Jacqueline Simoneau. "It's got a lot of difficulty but [the elements are] really well placed so you don't feel [the difficulty] while you're swimming."



Ukraine quickstep highlight. Photo (c) Anna Davydova

HIGHLIGHT

Ukraine was vying for its third highlight gold of the 2018 World Series, and its two minute, 30 second quickstep routine on Saturday did the trick. Some of the crowd-pleasing parts featured Alina Shynkarenko appearing to run on the surface of the water while using her teammates' backs as stepping stones; lifts and throws so high that the flyer nearly had time to rip out a double backflip, and, of course, 20 legs moving quickly in unison only a few inches apart.

France, the runner-up, also brought a high-energy routine to Offenbach's 'Galop Infernal' – the famous can-can music – which helped it capture gold in Tokyo and silver in Paris earlier in the 2018 World Series.

“It’s really fun to do this routine,” said Maureen Jenkins, 18. “The can-can is our trademark so we took a lot of pleasure showing all the people what France is about.”

Results

Solo free

1. Yukiko Inui (JPN) 92.9667
2. Yelyzaveta Yakhno (UKR) 91.3667
3. Jacqueline Simoneau (CAN) 90.7667

Duet free

1. Yukiko Inui and Kanami Nakamaki (JPN) 92.9333
2. Yelyzaveta Yakhno and Anastasiya Savchuk (UKR) 91.7333
3. Jacqueline Simoneau and Claudia Holzner (CAN) 89.5667

Highlight

1. Ukraine (UKR) 92.7667
2. France (FRA) 86.7000



Canada free duet bronze. Photo (c) Anna Davydova
