

Los Angeles Day 2: Italy and Ukraine prevail as expected

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(LOS ANGELES) – The heavy favorites prevailed on Day 2 of the FINA Artistic Swimming World Series in Los Angeles.

Reigning world champions Giorgio Minisini and Manila Flamini of Italy took gold in the technical event for mixed duet.

Ukraine’s “Beauty and the Beast” free combination scored 92 points to produce its fifth world series gold medal in the discipline.

Ukraine returned a few hours later to win the team free event, once again, earning more than 91 points for gold. The only surprise was Japan's disqualification in the team free event despite earning the second-highest score of the night with an exciting and evocative debut of a wolf-themed number. Japan’s swimmers didn’t match the start list, however so its score was erased.



Minisini and Flamini win mixed tech. Photo © Liz Corman

MIXED DUET TECHNICAL

To win the mixed duet technical program on Friday, Italy’s Giorgio Minisini, 22, and Manila Flamini, 30, reprised their 2017 world championship winning performance to “A Scream from Lampedusa” which tells the tragic tale of the overloaded fishing boat that caught fire and sunk near the Italian Island of Lampedusa in October 2013, killing more than 300 of the 500 African migrants on board. The routine began with Minisini screaming and holding Flamini’s limp body in his arms. In addition, their swimsuits featured

human handprints to represent those who died.

Although Minisini and Flamini's score of 87.2572 points wasn't their highest this season, the victory made them 3-for-3 in gold medals in every world series event they entered, matching earlier triumphs in Paris and Tokyo.

"I think they can do better," said their coach, Rossella Pibiri, "because the second part [today] is not really synchronized. The elements can be higher."

Minisini admitted to being jet lagged after the 14-hour flight from Rome to L.A.

"We have to get used [to it]," he said. "I think tomorrow [our free program] will be better."

Colombia's Jhair Galeano, 26, and Ingrid Usuga, 23, earned the silver medal with a robot-themed technical program. Although the Medellin-based pair has been training together for three years, it was their second competition together outside of Colombia. The two were beaming after receiving their score.

The key today was "the concentration, the energy," Usuga said.

"And the connection [between us]," Galeano added.



Ukraine wins combination gold. Photo © Liz Corman

COMBINATION FREE

In the free combination, Ukraine's "Beauty and the Beast" routine produced its fifth gold medal in five tries on the world series tour.

Ukraine has been perfecting the four-minute routine since its debut at the 2017 FINA World Championships. With its creative and powerful throws, sky-high lifts, and military precision that softened when the music dictated, the team's base, Valeriia Aprieliava, said that performing it feels different every time.

"Some days it's easier, some days it can be hard," she said, "but we always try to do it the same."

Japan took silver with a dramatic "Romeo and Juliet" routine that featured four athletes wearing red suits (to

represent Juliet), four athletes in blue suits (to represent Romeo), and two wearing white – one with red features, and one with blue features.

One of the blue Romeos, Yuriko Osawa, attributed their silver-medal success to the fact that everyone really acted their characters today.

The United States earned the bronze, its first medal at its home meet, with a 10-woman squad whose average age is 16.

Compared to the US combo performance last week in Surrey, Canada, 16-year-old swimmer Emmanuella Tchakmakjian said, “There was more unity and everybody was focused. We definitely wanted more energy, higher lifts, and to swim more dynamically. I feel like we were able to accomplish this” despite having only one week between events.



Ukraine wins team free again. Photo © Liz Corman

TEAM FREE

After winning the gold in team combination on Friday afternoon, team Ukraine took a one-hour rest, then hopped back into training for the evening’s team free event. Seven of its eight athletes did double-duty. Ukraine’s free routine showcased its highly-creative intertwining, acrobatics, and power to earn 91.667 points. It was the last time Ukraine would swim that routine on the 2018 world series tour. Its next appearance will be at the European championships in Glasgow in August.

As mentioned earlier, Japan’s second-best national team debuted a fierce and exciting wolf-themed program to score the second-highest total of the night, and was later disqualified for not having the right swimmers in its lineup.

As a result, Canada advanced into the silver-medal position with its “rising from the ashes” program. Team captain Claudia Holzner, 24, said, “It felt like such a good swim compared to in Surrey” where it earned bronze. “All of our lifts felt like they worked, the energy felt incredibly connected. It definitely was better.”

Japan's disqualification also boosted the US onto the podium. Its island-warrior "Moana" program earned the team its second bronze medal of the day. After Los Angeles, the US will next perform the routine at the 2018 junior world championships in Budapest in July.

"We're going to work very hard to improve the rankings of the United States," said American swimmer Emmanuella Tchakmakjian.

Results

Mixed duet technical

1. Manila Flamini and Giorgio Minisini (ITA) 87.2572
2. Ingrid Usuga and Jhair Galeano (COL) 76.4896

Combination free

1. Ukraine (UKR) 92.0000
2. Japan (JPN) 89.3000
3. United States (USA) 83.5667

Team free

1. Ukraine (UKR) 91.6667
 2. Canada (CAN) 86.9667
 3. United States (USA) 84.333
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