

Los Angeles Day 3: China wins duet free, Italy takes mixed duet free, Ukraine wins solo free and highlight

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(LOS ANGELES) – On the busiest day of artistic swimming at the FINA World Series event in Los Angeles, China’s Jiang twins won the free duet, Italy’s Giorgio Minisini and Manila Flamini won the free mixed duet, and Ukraine earned double gold thanks to Yelyzaveta Yakhno’s solo free performance and a tight highlight routine.

Yakhno, 20, now leaves North America with 16 medals – half from Surrey and half from Los Angeles. The Ukrainian star estimated that the entire pile of 10 golds and six silvers weighed about three or four kilos. Nevertheless, she said, “I keep them all” – even if it means dragging them home on a transoceanic flight.

Not bad for an athlete who started artistic swimming at age 8 when her parents took her to a pool in Donetsk. At first, she said, “I was very much crying, but after training for two years, I understood the sport very much and started to do it seriously.”

Next, the FINA Artistic Swimming World Series will continue in Syros Island, Greece (June 15-17) for the penultimate leg of the 10-city tour.



Simoneau soars to silver in solo free. Photo © Liz Corman

SOLO FREE

By scoring 91.337 in the free solo with a story about fighting a big fire in a city, Yelyzaveta Yakhno claimed her first world series gold medal in this discipline. It was a great accomplishment, too, because of her eight events, she said that free solo (along with free duet) is the hardest simply because of the physical difficulty and complexity of the maneuvers.

Jacqueline Simoneau, 21, trailed by only .1667 points to take silver and said she was delighted by “the way I lived the routine,” explaining that it was also the last time she would swim that free program so “I wanted to do every movement to the best of my ability and live every movement to the maximum.”

Simoneau's free routine, she said, had evolved over time. When she started working on it with Virginie Dedieu, the Olympic medalist and three-time world champion, she said their approach was “as if I was blind, looking for a way out. The routine kind of mimics my career as a soloist – feeling blind, feeling stuck, then finally being free at the end.”

Rather than taking her polished program to the 2019 world championships next summer, Simoneau said, “I’m brainstorming a new free solo for next year that will be even more impressive, more wow.”

Minami Kono, 21, of Japan earned the bronze medal with the international debut of her Dracula routine.

Kono was one of the swimmers affected by Japan’s disqualification in the team free event on Friday, but didn’t dwell on the past.

“I changed my mind[set] and today, try to do my best,” Kono said.



Japan highlight earns silver. Photo © Liz Corman

HIGHLIGHT

Ukraine won the highlight gold with its popular quickstep routine, a lively program that featured snippets of “Jump and Jive” and “It Don’t Mean a Thing” [if it ain’t got that swing]. Ukraine is now a perfect 4-for-4 in highlight victories at the world series events it has entered.

Overall, Valeriia Aprilieva, 21, said all 10 Ukrainian swimmers really enjoy the program because “it’s fun

for us, it's easy, and it's a short program [lasting two minutes, 30 seconds]. This is more fun than free team. All the [other] team events are serious.”

Aprilieva also said it was Ukraine's last quickstep routine of the year. The next time it appears, she said, might be in the 2019 world series tour because this summer's European championships won't have a highlight event.



Minisini throws Flamini for mixed duet gold. Photo © Liz Corman

MIXED DUET FREE

Italy's Giorgio Minisini, 22, and Manila Flamini, 30, won their second gold medal in two days with a new free routine called "The Duel," by the Hungarian composer Havasi. The program depicted a battle between angels and demons – angels during the piano sections and demons during the percussive stretches. The routine premiered at the Italian championships last week, and Saturday's competition in L.A. was a way to test it before the European championships in Glasgow in August.

After scoring 89.1667 points, their coach, Rossella Pribiri, said, "We hope for a higher score, but I'm happy, I'm happy. There is some mistakes, but it's a new routine. I'm satisfied."

The next time fans will see that free duet program will be on Syros Island, Greece at the ninth leg of world series.

"We aim to do better even there," Minisini said, "because we think that to get finally gender equity on this sport to get in the Olympics, we need to be seen. So the more competition we manage to do, the better it is." Greece will mark their fourth world series appearance this year.

Worth noting: Flamini is relatively new to the mixed free event, as she replaced Mariangela Perrupato with whom Minisini won two world championship medals (free silver in 2017, and free bronze in 2015). Flamini has already committed to competing through the 2019 world championships in South Korea.

Colombia's Jhair Galeano and Ingrid Usuga took silver with their jungle-themed program, 11.0667 points behind Italy.



Jiang Wen Wen and Ting Ting win duet free. Photo © Liz Corman

DUET FREE

In the free duet, the first competitors, Jiang Wen Wen and Jiang Ting Ting of China, immediately set a high standard as the twins scored 92.4667 for a “Swan Lake” performance they had been honing since the 2017 FINA World Championships. “We feel it is very beautiful,” said Wen Wen afterwards, “because the legs were long and beautiful like a swan.” The Jiangs will next perform this routine at the Asian Games in Indonesia in August.

Ukraine captured the duet free silver, scoring 91.8333. It was Yelyzaveta Yakhno's 16th and final event in 10 days. “I'm very happy because I'm finished,” she said, squinting and rubbing her eyes in pain while standing next to her duet partner, Anastasiya Savchuk.

Asked whether she would party or sleep tonight, Yakhno said emphatically, “Sleep!”

Japan's Minami Kono and Yuriko Osawa claimed the bronze medal with a personal best 90.2000 points for their clock-themed routine. Once they were out of public view, tears started streaming down their faces. Asked why they were crying so hard, they said because they had never swam it so well. They said their secret to success on Saturday was “to have fun.” Moments later, they were swarmed and embraced by their entire team – all of whom stayed by their sides, smiling, for at least 15 minutes as the competition concluded behind them.

Results

Solo Free

1. Yelyzaveta Yakhno (UKR) 91.3667
2. Jacqueline Simoneau (CAN) 91.2000
3. Minami Kono (JPN) 89.1667

Highlight

1. Ukraine (UKR) 92.6333
2. Japan (JPN) 89.3333

Mixed duet free

1. Giorgio Minisini and Manila Flamini (ITA) 89.1667
2. Jhair Galeano and Ingrid Usuga (COL) 78.1000

Duet Free

1. Jiang Ting Ting and Jiang Wen Wen (CHN) 92.4667
 2. Yelyzaveta Yakhno and Anastasiya Savchuk (UKR) 91.8333
 3. Minami Kono and Yuriko Osawa (JPN) 90.2000
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