

Wellbrock stuns the men's field, Cunha shines again in Balaton

Gergely Csurka, FINA Media Committee

In the fourth leg of the FINA/HOSA Marathon Swim World Series at Balatonfured, 21 year-old Florian Wellbrock claimed his first-ever title and proved he could be the next big hit from Germany. Netherlands's Olympic and world champion Ferry Weertman was a distant second in this race. Among the women, Ana Marcela Cunha added one more triumph to her treasury already featuring a handful of medals from Lake Balaton. She just out-touched Haley Anderson, preventing the US star from claiming back-to-back wins in the World Series.

As a kind of tradition at Balatonfured, however bad is the weather in the preceding period, on the competition day the Sun rules – and this was exactly the case this time too. Only the wind and the waves posed some challenge though not too hard for the competitors who enjoyed perfect water and air temperatures at the morning start.



A scene from Lake Balaton - Credit: LOC / Istvan Derencsenyi

The men's race was a kind of exceptionally simplified contest as Florian Wellbrock rushed to the leading position at the halfway mark and never looked back. The German already showed some extraordinary strength and speed three weeks ago at the French Open in Gravelines where he also came first in a similarly strong field. Now he was too good once more, broke away from the pack and gained 16.8sec on Ferry Weertman at the end – though he didn't offer too many smiles at any stage, it seemed to be just another chapter in his career...



Flying Dutchman - Ferry Weertman even had time to have some fun

“The waves were a bit new experience for me as I didn’t get used to them as a pool swimmer” Wellbrock said afterwards. “We had flat waters in Gravelines so this was hard and I wanted to reserve as much energy as possible over the first five kilometres, then speeded up in the second part and gave everything after the last buoy. I’m happy that this worked.”



Happy for each other: Axel Reymond and Ferry Weertman at the finish

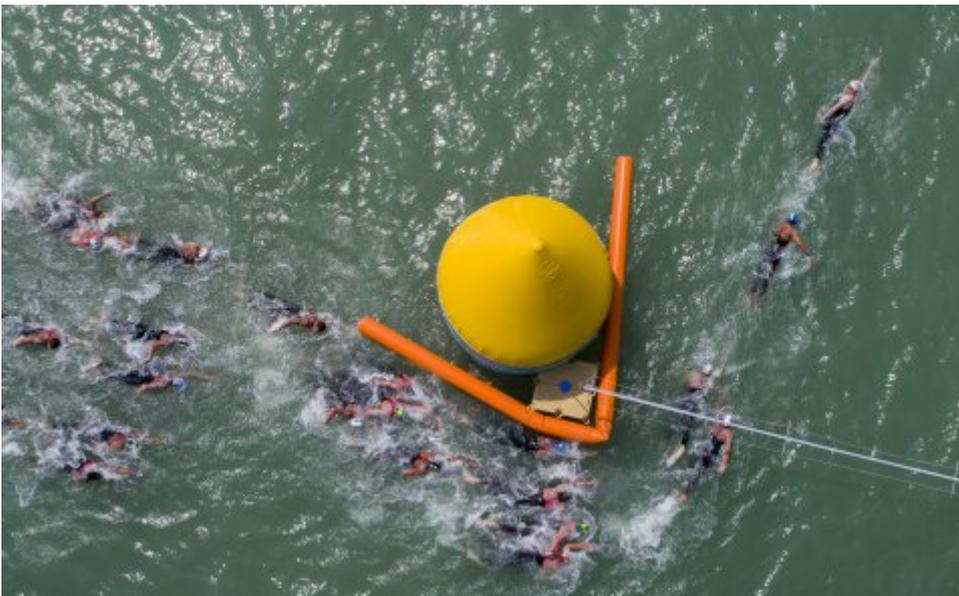
On the contrary, the reigning world and Olympic champion Dutchman, Ferry Weertman was all smiling while hugging France’s Axel Reymond after they came second and third respectively. For them, Lake Balaton brought success once more as Weertman clinched gold in the 10km last year at the FINA World Championships, while Reymond did the same in the 25km. And now they offered their thoughts while standing next to each other before the victory ceremony.



Medallists of the men's race: Weertman, Wellbrock (also in the top picture) and Reymond

“In Gravelines I discovered what Florian (Wellbrock) was capable of so he didn’t really surprise me, I just lacked the necessary energy to go with him” Weertman said. “I don’t want to look for excuses, it was his race and he did well, but in the field many of us struggled with the health issues we had after Setubal.” (The stomach problems hit many swimmers after last week’s leg, including the winner Kristof Rasovszky – in fact, the Hungarian’s competition turned into a survival test in home waters as he spent more time in the toilet before the start as in the last-call room – and came 43rd, after winning by 22sec in Setubal, he trailed by 4mins to the medallists here...)

“I’m really happy with this medal” Reymond said. “I have only one plan: to follow Ferry (both laughing). It worked, didn’t it? I mean, I enjoyed the competition, I could save the necessary energy for the last part of the race. Thanks to that, now I can stand here, next to Ferry! (laughter again...)”



A view from above: drone-shot at the turn before the final lap

“We love racing here, we have spectators all around the place” Weertman added. “People are awesome, they stop to watch the race, they really appreciate open water swimming and the athletes. The conditions, the organisation cannot be any better.”



Did it again: Ana Marcela Cunha touched in first, by a fingernail

The women’s race was a different affair. In the first half the lead was constantly changing but none of the eventual medal-winners showed up in front. They travelled with the pack before switching gears – then the finish was as thrilling as it could be. After the final gruelling sprint, five swimmers stormed in within 3.9sec, Brazil’s legend Ana Marcela Cunha was the fastest, out-touching USA’s Haley Anderson by 0.3sec, while Italy’s Rachele Bruni arrived with further 1.6sec adrift.

Cunha delivered another splendid job in Lake Balaton, she won the 2015 race here, last summer she made history by becoming the first woman medalling in all three individual events at one edition of the World Championships and now she managed to claim her first title in the current season of the World Series.



“It was all good out there” Ana Marcela said. “I love Balaton, I always achieve great results here just like today. It was a great finish, now I could do everything according to my plans and finally won a race this year.”

Haley Anderson was just tenths away from claiming back-to-back titles in the World Series, the Setubal winner wasn't disappointed though. *“I'm happy to be on the podium again after putting together another good race. It was different to Portugal, it was pretty hard as the waves made it really hard to draft. Tactically I wasn't the smartest at times, then I tried to fix those mistakes and just managed to do that.”*



Medallists of the women's race: Anderson, Cunha and Bruni

Rachele Bruni, the overall winner in 2016 and 2017 was happy with her bronze. *“It was a good race, winning a medal is great at any race at this level”* the Italian said.

FINA/HOSA Marathon Swim World Series, Leg 4, Balatonfured (HUN)

Medallists

Men

1. Florian Wellbrock (GER) 1:55:40.2
2. Ferry Weertman (NED) 1:55:57.0
3. Axel Reymond (FRA) 1:55:59.1

Women

1. Ana Marcela Cunha (BRA) 2:05:53.1
 2. Haley Anderson (USA) 2:05:53.4
 3. Rachele Bruni (ITA) 2:05:54.7
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