

Great fishes in the Aquarium – Budapest is ready to rock again

Gergely Csurka, FINA Media Committee

Held in a special meeting facility right in the middle of the city, called Aquarium, the ‘greatest human fishes’ of the series gathered for the opening press conference of the 4th leg of the FINA Swimming World Cup – a historical first edition in Budapest.

One year after the outstanding FINA World Championships staged in the Hungarian capital, the following big FINA swimming event, the World Cup, already produced amazing numbers. More than 500 swimmers from 40 countries are ready for action in the Duna Arena, a significant jump in participation. And among those half thousand there are 14 Olympic champions and 16 world champions – a ‘miniature’ World Championships are to return to the Duna Arena for three days.



Stars in the Aquarium (a special, underground place with a translucent roof covered with water, here recognisable as the Sun shone through the small waves outside): Chad le Clos, Laszlo Cseh, Katinka Hosszu, Sarah Sjostrom and Anton Chupkov - Credit: Istvan Derencsenyi

The press conference also offered extraordinary scenes as journalists and TV crews flooded the Aquarium to meet local heroes Katinka Hosszu and Laszlo Cseh, as well as other three leading swimmers of the World Cup series, 2017 overall winners Chad le Clos (RSA) and Sarah Sjostrom (SWE) and the winner of the first cluster this season, world champion Anton Chupkov (RUS).

“Perhaps our guests found it surprising, but here in Hungary we got used to the high interest towards swimming” Olympic champion Katinka Hosszu kicked off the conference. The Iron Lady continued with some irony saying “it was designed just like this: to get my 400th World Cup medal here in front of the home crowd. No, I’m just joking, in fact I’ve never counted, it turned out like this, so it makes this event even more special for me. I love swimming, I love to race a lot, it doesn’t matter how many golds I collect, the World

Cup is about having fun, great atmosphere, this is my pet event and I'm convinced the fans will also enjoy the show."

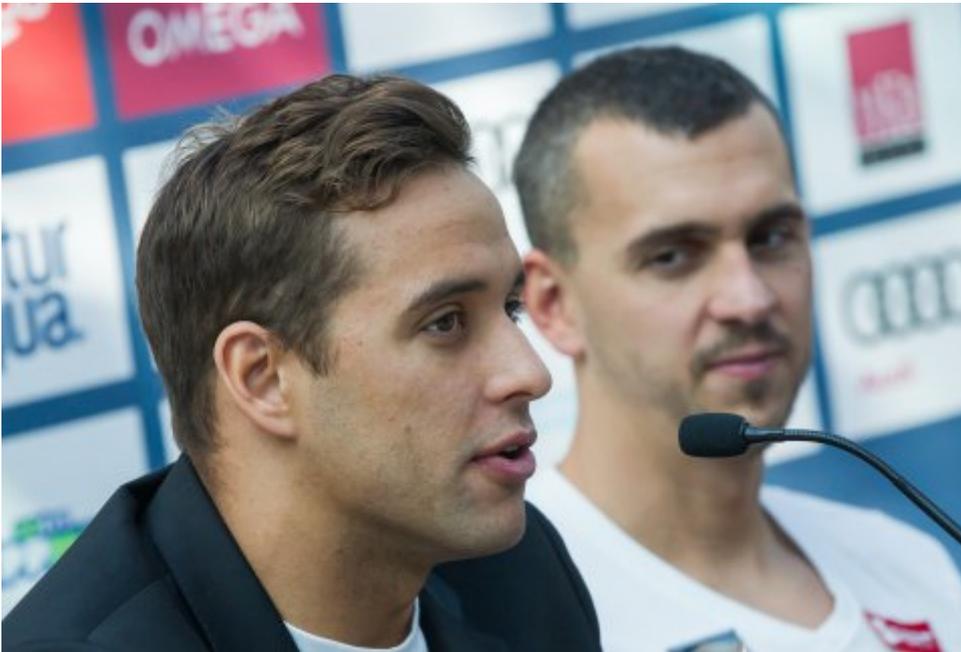


Fun rules in the World Cup!

The nation's darling added that this time she only enters six events, unlike in the previous legs. *"People here got used to see me coming in front, I don't want to slide in in the 8th place in races I usually do for practice purposes, so here I drop those ones."* Anyway, it's sure that Thursday will see another historical milestone passed by Hosszu as she stands with 399 World Cup medals (268 golds, 76 silvers, 55 bronzes) on the all-time ranks.

The other Hungarian hero, the never-aging Laszlo Cseh – 33 he turns in December –, medallists at four Olympics, the only swimmer in history making the podium at eight consecutive editions of the World Championships (2003-2017), also joins the party. *"I wasn't really fond of the World Cup, I made a try in 2012 but to be honest it was against my taste to travel all over the world. However, ever since I got silver last year at the World Champs, I haven't really found my shape in the meets held in the meantime. And I had to realise that the home crowd gave me such a push last July, racing at home gave me such a boost that I was really waiting for the occasion to live it through once again. I've been looking for this joy and I hope I can find that in the coming days. It's a pity that this leg is staged a bit early for me as I've returned to trainings a month ago, but I try to recall some better moments from the good old days as I had some remarkable results in the past in short-course events. For example I'm still pretty much proud of being the first to break the 4min barrier in the 400m IM."*

In fact, that was a world record, set in 2007 – it's great to see this grand champion still racing. That's what led Chad le Clos lifting Laszlo's hand last summer when he could touch the wall ahead of him at the Worlds here (in their trademark 200m fly). A scene the Hungarian fans shall never forget – and another proof that true friendship does exist even in the gruelling world of elite sport. *"Yeah, that was an amazing sensation and just as a follow-up, yesterday we were with Laszlo in their home for a brilliant dinner"* revealed Chad another chapter. *"Indeed last year was truly memorable as those great feelings from London 2012 were coming back after some worse years to get my first big win here in Budapest. It's going to be fantastic to return to the Arena, the most wonderful venue with the most wonderful crowd."*



Rivals in the pool, true friends in life: Chad le Clos and Laszlo Cseh

Something Sarah Sjöström also echoed while speaking about her expectations. *“The World Champs were really great, the facility was amazing, I was very successful with a handful of medals and two world records so I definitely wanted to come back.”* The Swede, who halted Katinka Hosszu’s run last year to clinch the overall title Hosszu claimed between 2012 and 2016, said that she is enjoying the duel with Katinka once again. *“Of course, the current rules help me a lot as Katinka collects loads of medals anyway but we can still stay on equal terms”* she said but to underline that first of all fun rules in these series among the swimmers, they posed with Katinka as two boxers in front of the World Cup Trophy. (And Hosszu added that some thirty swimmers from different nations went out for a common dinner the previous evening.)

Russia’s new breaststroke czar Anton Chupkov, the surprise winner of the first cluster (Kazan, Doha) admitted that in the first two legs the long-course pool suited him better. *“I felt better in the 50m pool, coming from Glasgow where I set a new European record. Now I try to do my best over short-course, we’ll see how far I can go.”*

Host federation president Sandor Wladar, himself an Olympic champion as well (in Moscow 1980), thanked FINA and the Hungarian Government and the event partners for their trust and support in order to stage a great historical first World Cup in Budapest. *“Let me also add that while we are grateful for all stakeholders, we must mention that it was Katinka and Laszlo – and Daniel Gyurta who called it a day recently – who lift Hungarian swimming to new heights. Today, thanks to them, we are so highly ranked that it also helped a lot to convince the decision-makers while we were bidding to host great events and won those bids in succession.”* The President also mentioned that having such an outstanding venue as the Duna Arena is a kind of obligation to stage big FINA events here, *“but our motivation goes beyond that as these meets and these great stars serve as the best tools for inspiring the future generations. So Katinka, Sarah, Laszlo, Chad, Anton, thanks for coming here and help us to achieve this noble goal.”*



President of the Hungarian Swimming Association, Sandor Wladar, Olympic champion in Moscow 1980 (200m back)

The 4th leg of the FINA Swimming World Cup in Budapest kicks off on Thursday, with heats held from 9.30CET and finals from 18.00CET (17.00 on Friday). All action can be followed live on FINA TV.
