

Getting to know Budapest's Duna Arena

By Aimee Berg, FINA Press Correspondent (USA)

Only 15 months have passed since Duna Arena hosted the swimming and diving program at the 2017 FINA World Championships in Budapest. And already, the modern metallic venue on the eastern bank of the Danube River is in "legacy mode."

It doesn't mean that all 11 world records set there in 2017 have vanished. (In fact, eight remain.)

But it does mean that two-thirds of its 12,000 seats have been removed, reducing its capacity to 5,000.

It also means that its pools are now open to the public. In fact, Hungary's three-time Olympic gold medalist and seven-time world champion Katinka Hosszu started a competitive and recreational swim school at Duna Arena in August 2018. It is called "Iron Swim" which refers to the "Iron Lady" nickname the Chinese press gave Hosszu several years ago to describe her indestructibility.

It also means that the venue's repertoire has broadened to include other aquatic events. In June, for example, it hosted the men's water polo World League Super Final. In July, it hosted artistic swimming's Junior World Championships. And, this week, swimming - and Hosszu - returns for a three-day run (through Saturday) at a FINA short-course World Cup event.

Like most spectacular sporting venues, however, Duna Arena is hard to imagine without being here in person. It is also difficult to fully capture on a screen.



Perhaps it's more tangible to think of the space this way:

Its footprint covers 50,000 square metres which is about the size of a polo field, or nearly two-thirds of Buckingham Palace, or about 11 times as big as Bill Gates house in Washington state which includes 7 bedrooms, 24 bathrooms, 6 kitchens, 6 fireplaces, a gym, a dining room, and a library.

Duna Arena stands 44 metres tall, which is just two metres shorter than Statue of Liberty in New York City (from the top of the base to the top of the torch). It measures five metres less than the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. It is also the height of 19 Yao Mings or 20 Shaquille O'Neals if each NBA star could be vertically arranged.

Duna's water capacity is 9,803 cubic metres. That's akin to 60,000 bathtubs full of water or 150,000 US kegs of beer or 15 million Starbucks venti coffees.

And the entire structure took less than two years to build.

And yet, Duna is even more than a pool. In fact, all the water was drained to host one of the last major international sporting events prior to this week's Swimming World Cup: the 2018 amateur Boxing World Championships for 17-18 year olds. From August 21-31, more than 340 bouts took place in two rings placed on top of the 50-metre competition pool. It reportedly took six divers and 30 construction workers to assemble and dismantle the set-up.

For Hungarians with long memories, it was reminiscent of the 1948 London Olympics where the Budapest southpaw Laszlo Papp boxed his way to a middleweight gold medal in a ring that was also built over a swimming venue: the Empire Pool at Wembley. The Empire Pool was 14 years old at the time. Duna isn't even two.

By that standard and many others, Duna Arena is way ahead of the game.
