

YOG BA 2018: Pignatiello's tears touch the entire country

FINA Communications Department

The third day of the swimming competition at the Youth Olympic Games, taking place in Buenos Aires (ARG), started with a thrilling atmosphere at the Natatorium, with the final of the women's 800m free. Two Argentinean swimmers were present in the decisive race, and the entire nation – represented by packed stands and many dozens of journalists in the mixed zone – was expecting a gold for the local hero, Delfina Pignatiello.

Competing in lane 4, Pignatiello, 18 years old, was one of the stars of the 2017 FINA World Junior Swimming Championships, where she won gold in this event. Until the 100m-mark, the Argentinean seemed to control operations, but from then until the end of the race, Hungary's Ajna Kesely was faster, and eventually won in 8:27.60. Pignatiello got the silver in 8:32.42, while Austria's Marlene Kahler was third in 8:36.57. Only this trio could swim inside 8:40, as the second Argentinean in the final – Delfina Dini – had to content with the fourth place, in a distant 8:43.71.

Pignatiello earned the first medal for Argentina in the swimming competition, after previous successes at FINA events: in Indianapolis, at the 2017 Junior Worlds, she had also won gold in the 1500m free, plus a silver in the 400m free. At the 2016 FINA World Swimming Championships (25m) in Windsor (CAN), she had been finalist (sixth) in the 800m.

Visibly touched by emotion on the podium, Pignatiello displayed her hand with the word "Abuela" ("Grandmother"), accompanied by a heart. In the mixed zone, she explained: "I had a very complicated year, and I recently lost my grandma. Therefore, I was very emotional on the podium, listening to the huge support of the crowd. The atmosphere was absolutely fantastic", confessed the swimmer. Her silver medal was the best result so far in the Games for Argentina (all sports included), after a bronze in the rowing events.



The women

The second final of the day, the women's 200m back, was an interesting fight between four swimmers: Tatiana Salcutan (MDA), Madison Broad (CAN), Kaylee McKeown (AUS) and Rhyan White (USA). All finished within the same second, with a surprising gold medal for Salcutan in 2:10.13. Broad got the silver in 2:10.32, and was followed by McKeown (2:10.67) and by White (fourth, in 2:10.95). The previous best performances of the Moldovan swimmer included the eighth place in the 100m back here in Buenos Aires, two bronze medals in the 100m and 200m back at the recent leg of the FINA Swimming World Cup in Kazan (RUS), and a 7th position in the 200m at the 2017 Indianapolis rendezvous.

Also unexpected was the outcome in the men's 100m butterfly. After getting the gold in the 200m and 400m free in Buenos Aires, Kristof Milak, from Hungary, was the swimmer to watch in the butterfly race. But things didn't go as planned, with the 2017 silver world medallist in the event, finishing also second in Argentina, in a time of 51.50. Andrei Minakov, from Russia, was slightly better, touching for gold in 51.12. The Russian champion got his first individual title at these Games, after earning gold in the mixed 4x100m free relay.



Andrei Minakov (RUS)

In the women's 100m free, Barbora Seemanova, from Czech Republic, obtained her best performance so far, touching for gold in 54.19. Last year, at the 2017 FINA Junior Worlds, she had been in three finals – 4th in the 50m free, 5th in the 100m free and 7th in the 200m free -, while more recently, at the Eindhoven leg of the FINA Swimming World Cup she was 6th in the 200m. In Buenos Aires, she was better than Yang Junxuan (CHN, silver in 54.43), and Neza Klančar (SLO, bronze in 54.55).

“It means a lot. I don't have any words. I'm a Youth Olympic champion and it's an amazing feeling. I'm happier than I have been in the last eight years”, confessed Seemanova, after her triumph.



Barbora Seemanova (CZE)

In the end of the session, Minakov got the second gold of the day, helping his team to clinch the title in the 4x100m free relay. Closing the quarter performance in 48.93, the Russian stopped the watch in a time of 3:18.11. The first athlete to compete for Russia was Kliment Kolesnikov, who had, some minutes before,

qualified first for the final of the men's 50m back in 24.56. In the relay final, Brazil was second in 3:20.99, while the bronze went to Italy in 3:22.01.
