

YOG BA 2018: Variety and legacy on the programme

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At the end of the fourth swimming competition day at the Youth Olympic Games in Buenos Aires (ARG), no less than 29 countries have already collected at least one medal in the event. This equals the mark obtained in 2014 (in 2010, there were 27 nations), but with two more finals' sessions to go, the mark of 30 can be reached. Whatever the outcome, those numbers are already above the average statistic at the elite Olympic Games, or even the number of National Federations with medals at the FINA World Championships.

At Olympic level, the last three editions registered about 20 countries on the podium (Beijing 2008 – 21; London 2012 – 17; Rio 2016 – 18), while the FINA World Championships is registering between 20 and 25 nations with medals. The best number in recent years was 25 in Rome 2009, followed by 20 in 2011 (Shanghai), 22 in 2013 (Barcelona), 23 in 2015 (Kazan), and 22 in 2017 (Budapest). At 25m-pool level, the numbers are similar: in Manchester 2008, 19 NF were on the podium, while Dubai 2010 registered 22, Istanbul 2012 provided medals to 25 nations, Doha 2014 was a happy event for 23 NF and Windsor 2016 saw athletes from 22 national delegations to climb on the podium.



Buenos Aires 2018: Abdelrahman Sameh (EGY)

Here in Buenos Aires, the first day was significant: out of three finals and nine available medals, they all went to athletes from different countries: Brazil, China, France, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Japan, Russia and Serbia.

Moreover, at this stage of the competition (23 finals were contested so far, 13 more to go), many countries not so used to shine at elite Olympic or FINA events are able to place their best young swimmers at the top of the world hierarchy. In this group, we can include nations such Israel, Slovenia, Kyrgyzstan, Argentina, Austria, Moldova, Egypt, Greece, Ireland or Czech Republic. The challenge upon the conclusion of these Youth Olympic Games is to remain competitive at elite level.

If we look at the first two editions of this event, we can find some notable cases of athletes shining in Singapore (2010) and Nanjing (2014), and then continuing their successful path into the “adult” competitions.



Buenos Aires 2018: Savvas Thomoglou (GRE)

Quickly looking at the medallists in the men's events in 2010, one name stands out: Chad Le Clos, from South Africa. Born on April 12, 1992 he became since the YOG rendezvous one of the undeniable stars of the pools, amassing medals and successes at World Championships and Olympic Games. In 2010, a younger Le Clos won gold in the 200m IM, was silver medallist in the 100m and 200m fly, and in the 400m free, and won the bronze in the 4x100m free relay.

Ambassador of the competition in 2014 and 2018, the South African star has collected four Olympic medals (including an epic gold in the 200m fly at the 2012 Games, when he beat Michael Phelps in a thrilling final!), was five times (four titles) on the podium of the World Championships, and collected 11 medals at the FINA World Swimming Championships (25m). He has been also one of the protagonists of the annual series of the Swimming World Cup.



Chad Le Clos (RSA)

Kenneth To (AUS), also a regular presence in the World Cup was another successful athlete in 2010, returning home with six medals around the neck, including the title in the 4x100m medley relay. Since then, he never placed in the top-3 in the “elite” Games, but got a silver at the 2013 Worlds in the 4x100m medley, and three additional medals in the 25m-pool world rendezvous.

Among women, Daryna Zevina (UKR) came from Singapore with three medals: one gold in the 100m back, one silver in the 50m back, and one bronze in the 200m back. Born on September 1, 1994 the Ukrainian star could never replicate this success at elite level (at least in 50m-pool), earning since then another three medals at the FINA World Swimming Championships (25m) rendezvous in 2012 (first in the 200m back), 2014 (third in the 100m back) and 2016 (bronze in the 200m back).

Boglarka Kapas, from Hungary, was only 17 when she won two titles in Singapore (400m free and 200m fly), plus a silver in the 200m free. Quite successful on a continental level, Kapas had some difficulty in imposing her class (perhaps because a certain Katie Ledecky...) in the long freestyle events – she could however earn two important bronze medals, in the 1500m free in Kazan 2015 and in the 800m free at the London 2012 Olympics.

Emma McKeon was in evidence in Singapore, after winning the 4x100m medley relay, collecting one silver in the 100m free, and two bronze in the 50m and 200m free. Since then, she has proven a very reliable relay swimmer for Australia – 12 medals so far in these events at Olympic Games and World Championships -, but had also her individual glory moments in the 200m free (bronze at the 2012 Olympics and silver at the 2017 Worlds) and in the 100m fly (second in Budapest last summer).



Buenos Aires 2018: Niamh Coyne (IRL)

Finally, Yi Tang (CHN) was the most “golden” girl in Singapore 2010, with six titles: 50m, 100m and 200m, plus the 4x100m free and the mixed 4x100m free and 4x100m medley relay. Born in January 1993, she had a short top-level career that included the bronze in the 100m free at the 2012 Olympics, two relay medals at the 2011 Worlds in Shanghai (her hometown), and five more podium presences at the short-course Worlds in 2010 and 2012.

The 2014 edition of the YOG was highlighted in the women’s swimming competition by the presence of Ruta Meilutyte. The Lithuanian, born in March 1997, was already a star when she arrived in Nanjing. Two years before, at the London Olympics, she had surprisingly won the gold medal in the 100m breaststroke, getting her only Games’ title so far, at just 15. At the Barcelona 2013 FINA World Championships,

Meilutyte wins the 100m event, and places second in the 50m breaststroke. She will earn the gold in both events at the 2014 YOG rendezvous! Since then, her career at world level has been more erratic, with just one gold (50m breast) and one silver (100m breast) at the 2014 short-course Worlds and an additional silver in the 100m breast in Kazan 2015.

From the side of the raising talents, Tamas Kenderesi, from Hungary, won the men's 200m fly. In Rio 2016, he gets bronze in his pet event, failing the podium, at home, in Budapest 2017 – only fourth. From Japan, Ipppei Watanabe was the winner of the 200m breast and second in the 100m in Nanjing, then becoming one of the world leaders in the longer event (third in Budapest and sixth at the Rio 2016 Games). He is the current World Record holder in this distance, with a 2:06.67 effort performed in January 2017 in Tokyo.

Evgeny Rylov (RUS) was another athlete in evidence in Nanjing, after winning three gold (50m and 100m back, and 4x100m medley) and one silver medal (200m back). He has since then confirmed his world-class in the 200m back, with one Olympic medal (bronze, 2016), one gold (Budapest 2017) and one bronze (Kazan 2015) at the World Championships. His compatriot Anton Chupkov has a very similar trajectory, with a third place in the 200m breast at the 2014 YOG, then bronze in the same event at the Rio Olympics, and gold at the 2017 Worlds.

All these examples constitute a strong motivation, not only for the young talents from nations normally at the top of elite competitions, but mainly for the swimmers coming from countries with a less successful record at Olympic or world level.
