

## YOG BA 2018: Mexico takes gold after thrilling final

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In the most interesting final of the diving competition at these Youth Olympic Games in Buenos Aires (ARG), Randal Willars Valdez gave a brilliant gold medal to Mexico, by finishing first in the men's 10m platform, with 609.80. He defeated China's Lian Junjie, who had been the best of the preliminaries. Lian got the silver in 600.05, while the bronze went to Ruslan Ternovoi, from Russia, in 596.85.

It was a five-round final with a lot of changes in the lead, and the outcome of the competition was only known in the very last combination. Lian had to start very strong, as he carried on the third (190.85) best points of the heats (the total after the first four dives), behind the Mexican (192.95) and the Russian (206.20) athlete.



Lian Junjie (CHN)

Everyone started quite solid in the final, with the three leaders performing the same diving, a 407C (inward 3 ½ somersaults in the tuck position, DD 3.2). Lian was absolutely perfect in the execution, getting four 10s from the judges for a score of 94.40. Willars Valdez was also solid with 81.60 and Ternovoi followed with 76.80. The Chinese talent was in the lead and had recovered his “delay”, with a 2.25 point-advantage over the Russian challenger.

Came round 2 and Willars Valdez perfectly executed a 307C (reverse 3 ½ somersaults in the tuck position) – 91.80 -, while Lian chose a slightly easier combination, a 207C (back 3 ½ somersaults, tuck, DD 3.3) and

was not so successful, over-rotating a bit in the entry. The Mexican assumes the lead of the competition, with 366.35, against 364.25 for the Chinese diver. Ternovoi had at this stage his poorest dive of the session, a very “short” 307C, with marks between 4.5/6.0.

The 1-2 top positions changed once more in the following round of dives: this time, Lian presented his 307C, well noted by the judges (81.60), while the Mexican had some problems with his armstand combination (back 3 somersaults, in the pike position). He over-rotated and his marks reflected this mistake, ranging from 5.5 to 7.0. Lian was again in the top of the provisional ranking, with 446.05, against Willars Valdez’ 429.35. For the bronze, nothing changed, with the Russian talent superbly executing the same dive than the Mexican (but in the tuck position).



Ruslan Ternovoi (RUS)

Then, came the key moment of the final, when the Latin American diver performed a 207B (back 3 ½ somersaults in the pike position, DD 3.6) in a perfect way, earning a total of 97.20, the best intermediate score of the entire session. A couple of minutes later, Lian performed his 109C (forward 4 ½ somersaults, tuck, DD 3.7), but slightly over-rotated it, earning 74.00 from the judges. Willars Valdez came back to the lead, this time with a 6.5-point advantage over his main challenger. The Russian ace continued to perform regularly and got an interesting 82.50 for his 207C, thus consolidating the third position.

Having more points than Lian and presenting a more difficult dive in the last round, the Mexican had all the keys in hand to get the gold. And he didn’t miss the opportunity to do it. Executing the 109C clearly better (83.25) than Lian in the previous round, he had to wait for the Chinese’s last combination, a 5253B (back 2 ½ somersaults 1 ½ twists, pike), only worth a DD 3.2. Lian performed it well (80.00), but this was clearly not enough to recover the lead. In the end Willars Valdez accumulated 609.80, while Lian totalled 600.05.

It was the second defeat for China in the diving events at these Games, after the victory of Colombia’s Daniel Restrepo Garcia in the men’s 3m springboard. Also competing in the higher board, he was not so inspired this time, finishing 12<sup>th</sup> and last, after having skipped his armstand dive due to a difficulty in maintaining the starting position.



## The men

It was almost the opposite situation for Lian (18 years old on November 3), who had finished 10<sup>th</sup> in the 3m and earned silver in the platform. Willars Valdez had been fifth in the lower board, while Ternovoi, 17, can be called the more regular diver at these Games – he earned bronze in both events he participated in.

“I feel I bit disappointed, as I did not perform well the dives I am used to execute during training. However, I have to thank my coach and all the staff that is supporting me, and I feel very proud to represent China in this competition. I had an injury quite recently, and everyone worked very hard so that I could be here in optimal conditions”, confessed Lian at the end of his performance.

On the side of Willars Valdez (16 years old), the enthusiasm was more present: “There are always things to improve, but I am quite happy with this result. I am very proud to have won, to be in the highest march of the podium and listen to the anthem of my country. This is something unbelievable! My main competitors were very consistent, but I remained focused throughout the final”, confessed the Mexican diver.

“Since I arrived, I knew I could win a medal. I worked for that, and I managed to stay concentrated. I knew I had talent and a good competitive attitude. In the end, all worked well and the effort paid off”, he continued.

Asked if he wants to reinforce the successful tradition of Mexico in diving, Willars Valdez admitted: “Yes, we have a lot of talents back at home. We need to continue working hard, so that the results can be always successful. The key for victory was my hard training – I presented difficult dives, but I worked them well. China is a powerhouse in the discipline, but I train with some of them and when you put some pressure, they are human beings and can also fail”.

On the future goals, he concluded: “Firstly, the 2019 competitions, such as the World Championships and the Pan-American Games. Then, of course, the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo. This is for what I am working for and I expect to represent my country in Japan!”.

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