

## Abu Dhabi, Day 1: Flawless Paredes (MEX) brilliantly leads

FINA Communications Department

The final two rounds of the 2018 FINA High Diving World Cup, taking place on November 10 in Abu Dhabi (UAE) will certainly be thrilling, after the preliminaries held today in the capital of UAE. Among men, Jonathan Paredes (MEX) is the provisional leader after the initial two dives, displaying an excellent technique and performing very clean entries in the water. On Day 1, the Mexican star totalled 204.40, and from the 14 scores given by the judges for the two combinations, he had one 8.5, one 10 and all remaining marks between 9.0 and 9.5.

Paredes particularly excelled in his second attempt, a back 3 somersaults 3 twists in the pike position, which was flawless and deserved a perfect 10 from the judges. Participating in the FINA events since the inclusion of the discipline at the 2013 World Championships, the Mexican great was bronze medallist in that inaugural edition, and upgraded to silver in the subsequent edition of the FINA showcase, in 2015 in Kazan. At World Cup level, he was second in 2016.



Gary Hunt (GBR)

In Abu Dhabi, his main challengers are, until now, Gary Hunt (GBR) and Steve LoBue (USA). The British legend is second with 192.15 and is naturally fighting to get his third consecutive World Cup title. Hunt was clearly less solid than the Mexican in the first dive (for the same DD of 2.8, Paredes got 75.60, while Hunt totalled 67.20), but his second combination was quite consistent. Performing a front 3 somersaults 3 ½ twists (DD 4.9), he scored 124.95, the second best of the day after the massive 128.80 from the provisional leader.

In third, Steve LoBue, the 2017 world champion, presented his complex front 5 somersaults with ½ twist in

the pike position (the only high diver to perform it), but the execution was not perfect, earning marks between 7.5 and 8.0 from the judges. However, with a DD 5.1 that was good enough to earn a consistent 122.40 for a total of 191.00.

The good surprise of the day is the fourth provisional position of Romania's Constantin Popovici, a former pool diver who is making his debut in the high diving world. With a very solid technique, the Romanian now totals 187.05, and is followed by 2017 world silver medallist Michal Navratil (CZE, fifth in 181.45). In seventh so far, the third best in Budapest 2017, Italy's Alessandro De Rose (168.45).



A total of 26 divers started the competition – Murilo Galves (BRA) and Todor Spasov (BUL) got injured in the training -, but one athlete could not perform the second dive, Colombian Orlando Duque. The 2013 world champion got injured after the initial round and will skip the remaining of the competition.

Among women, with 12 entries, the fight for the gold will predictably be between Rhiannan Iffland (AUS), the 2017 world champion and silver medallist of the previous World Cup, and Lysanne Richard (CAN), the winner of the 2016 World Cup. Before the final day, the Australian is leading with 150.15, but the Canadian is not far, with 146.00.

The duel for the bronze will also be interesting, with three athletes with good chances to be in the podium area. Newcomers Eleanor Smart (USA) and Jessica Macaulay (GBR), respectively third and fifth after the preliminaries, are performing solidly, but they must be attentive to veteran Ginger Huber (USA), in fourth. The North American, at almost 44, is a true legend in the women's circuit and an example of successful longevity. Silver medallist at the 2013 Worlds, she replicated that result at the 2014 World Cup, and was third in the 2016 edition of the competition. In 2017, she was fourth also in Abu Dhabi and finished ninth at the FINA World Championships in Budapest. With 135.10, she is not far from Smart (138.30), and is slightly better than Macaulay (133.50).

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