

Hangzhou, Day 2: USA shines with five gold medals

FINA Communications Department

Swimmers of the United States dominated operations in the second day of the 14th FINA World Swimming Championships (25m), taking place until December 16, 2018 in Hangzhou (CHN). Out of the eight finals at stake, the North Americans got five gold medals, with two of them generating new World Records. Katinka Hosszu, the Magyar star, was also in good shape (one gold and one silver), while Alia Atkinson (JAM) triumphed after three consecutive silver medals, and Cameron van der Burgh (RSA) “recovered” his 2010 gold in the 100m breast, before announcing his retirement from the pools.

The day started in the best possible way, with a new World Record by the US women’s 4x50m medley relay, in a time of 1:42.38. The previous best global mark was already owned by the North Americans, when they clocked 1:43.27 in Windsor 2016. In Hangzhou, the US quartet was formed by Olivia Smoliga, Katie Meili, Kelsi Dahlia and Mallory Comerford. The minor medals went to China, silver, in 1:44.31, and to the team of the Netherlands, bronze in 1:44.57. This was the third time this event was included in the World Championships’ programme, with the first title going to Denmark in 2014, followed by the US success two years ago in Canada.



Katinka Hosszu (HUN) - Photo by Istvan Derencsenyi

In one of the most awaited races of the day, the men’s 100m back, the fastest of the semis was China’s Xu Jiayu (third in 2016), world record holder of the distance since last November in 48.88. In a thrilling final, Xu could not respond to Ryan Murphy’s speed, who touched for gold in 49.23. The Chinese star had to content with silver in 49.26, while the hero of the last Youth Olympic Games in Buenos Aires, Russia’s Kliment Kolesnikov was bronze medallist in 49.40. Mitch Larkin, from Australia, with two consecutive titles in this event (2014 and 2016) was close to the podium, but finished fourth in Hangzhou (49.46).

Katinka Hosszu (HUN) accumulated another success in these Championships, with a brilliant victory in the women's 200m fly. With 50m to go, Kelsi Dahlia (USA) looked in a good position to take the title, but the Magyar's very strong final was decisive for the gold in 2:01.60, against 2:01.73 for the US swimmer. The bronze went to Japan's Suzuka Hasegawa in 2:04.04. It was the third title for Hosszu in this event, after previous successes in 2012 and 2016 (the winner in 2010 and 2014, Spain's Mireia Belmonte is not competing in China). Moreover, it was the second gold of the Hungarian in Hangzhou, after the triumph in the 400m IM.

Swimming in lane 7, Cameron van der Burgh (RSA) swam a very fast men's 100m breaststroke race, to touch home for gold in 56.01, a new Championships record. The previous best mark of the competition (56.29) had been established by Felipe Franca (BRA) in Doha 2014. The South African star (2012 Olympic champion) had won in 2010 and was second 10 years ago in Manchester (GBR), and owns the World Record in the event, with a 2009 effort of 55.61. Ilya Shymanovich, from Belarus, earned silver in 56.10, while Yasuhiro Koseki, from Japan, concluded third in 56.13. Fabio Scozzoli (ITA), winner in 2012, was fourth this time (56.48).



Cameron van der Burgh (RSA) - Photo by Istvan Derencsenyi

In another much-anticipated final, Alia Atkinson (JAM, WR holder in 28.56) convincingly won the women's 50m breaststroke race, in 29.05, much faster than her best time of the semis, 29.54. It was her first win in this event, after three consecutive silver medals in 2012, 2014 (on both occasions behind Ruta Meilutyte, LTU), and 2016 (when Lilly King, USA, won). The Lithuanian star was precisely the contender to beat, and Atkinson's strategy was successful this time. Meilutyte finished second in 29.38, with bronze going to Italy's Martina Carraro (29.59).

In the men's 200m free, Blake Pieroni's tactics worked quite well. Swimming in lane 8, the US star departed very fast and was under the WR pace until the 100m-mark. He then lost some stamina, but the advantage was sufficient to comfortably touch first for gold in 1:41.49. Almost on the other end of the pool (in lane 3), Danas Rapsys (LTU, winner of the 400m free) also did a very intelligent race, earning silver in 1:41.78. The bronze went to Alexander Graham (AUS), in 1:42.28. Pieroni's best individual result so far at the FINA World Swimming Championships (25m) had been a fourth place in the 100m free in Windsor 2016.



Blake Pieroni (USA) - Photo by Istvan Derencsenyi

Hosszu was again in action in the 100m back, where she was naturally expecting to get a third world crown, after the wins in 2014 and 2016. This time, the Magyar great was not so successful, and had to content with silver, behind the 2012 winner, US Olivia Smoliga. The winner took 56.19 to complete the four laps, while the Hungarian swimmer (WR holder in 55.03) touched in 56.26. Georgia Davies (GBR) replicated her 2016 result, sharing the bronze in 56.74 with Minna Atherton (AUS).



Photo by Istvan Derencsenyi

In the last event of the session, the mixed 4x50m free relay, the US quartet established the second WR of the evening, with a 1:27.89 effort, much faster than the previous global mark, owned by the Netherlands in 1:28.39, since December 2017. The winners started their race with two men (Caeleb Dressel and Ryan Held), who were followed by Mallory Comerford and Kelsi Dahlia. Contested since 2014, this is the second win for the North Americans, after the triumph of Russia in 2016. In Hangzhou, the silver went to the Netherlands (1:28.51), while the Russians were only third in 1:28.73.

QUOTES

Ryan Murphy (USA) – Gold, men’s 100m back

"It was super close. It wasn't the cleanest race from me, but it's good to come out on top. This is only my second ever time racing over the short course. It's a little bit different, but coming in having no time expectations is pretty nice".

Olivia Smoliga (USA) – Gold, women’s 100m back

"The time is OK, but just the fact that I was able to race hard next to such strong women in my heat means the world to me. I really wanted to get my hand on the wall first and just go as hard as I could and I'm glad it turned out the way it did".

(On beating Hosszu): "It's badass. She's so incredible. In the ready room, it's really cool because everybody has their game face on. She has her headphones in and it's intimidating. But you know what, we all race hard, we all train hard, so I was really pumped to be with all those girls for sure".

Alia Atkinson (JAM) – Gold, women’s 50m breast

"It is my first gold at the worlds. I was very happy about that. Considering the World Cup schedule and I broke the world record two months ago in Budapest, I don't think myself as the top dog in the 50m breaststroke. Once in the final, everybody can win the race. I have been collecting the mascots from the all the meets. My father made me a structure and I am already thinking of a spot to put Qili".

Blake Pieroni (USA) – Gold, men’s 200m free

“It was a great race, but probably not the best split. I was struggling this morning but I am very happy with the win. I had a great time racing at the FINA World Cup Series this season which has given me the chance to learn how to race the short course metres. While I have raced the 200 yard freestyle thousands of times, It is a totally different from the 200m short course race”.

Cameron van der Burgh (RSA) – Gold, men’s 100m breast

“I am beyond happy. When I made the turn at 75 metres, I knew I had a good chance and I had to hold on. Luckily it wasn’t one metre more or I would have lost that one. It means the world to me. It is my last race, so I am extremely happy. The world championship means a lot. It is the last one. It is sad but I am happy to end on a high. The last 25 metres was the most pain I have ever had in my life in swimming, so it was a good way to finish. It is funny how these things turn out. At least I have no loose ends to tie up or reason to come back”.

Katinka Hosszu (HUN) – Gold, women’s 200m fly

“I am pretty excited about the 200 butterfly. When we finished, I thought I was second, but it was exciting to see I was able to touch the wall first. It was fun to race Kelsi because she beat me racing on the World Cup and she always pushes the first 100, but she changed her tactics and she let me go on the first 100 and I said 'you sneaky [girl], you changed your tactic”.
