

CSS, Budapest, Day 1: Russia dominates with four gold medals

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At the end of the first day of the second leg of the “FINA Champions Swim Series” in Budapest (HUN), Russia was the country with more reasons to celebrate, with their swimmers getting four gold medals out of the 14 individual finals contested in the “Duna Arena”. Italy and Hungary were happy with two triumphs, while Sarah Sjöström (SWE) was also the best on two occasions. Otherwise, the gold was distributed to Great Britain, Switzerland, Brazil and Lithuania, with one champion each.



Sarah Sjöström (SWE) - Photo by Istvan Derencsenyi

The protagonist of the Russian saga was Yulia Efimova, winner of the women’s 50m and 200m breaststroke. In the shorter distance, the winner of three Olympic medals and 14 World Championships (50m) awards, was first in 30.26, while in the 200m she needed 2:22.52 to finish the race. In the men’s 100m backstroke, Evgeny Rylov (2017 World champion in the 200m) controlled operations and touched home in 52.81, while Anastasia Fesikova was also out of reach in the women’s 50m backstroke (gold in 27.58).

After winning four gold and one silver in Guangzhou, the first leg of the Series on April 27-28, Sarah Sjöström (three Olympic and 12 world medals) was the best in the 100m free (53.03) and, of course, in her pet event, the 100m butterfly (56.78).



Kristof Milak (HUN) - Photo by Istvan Derencsenyi

Hungary had started in the best possible way this initial day, with two consecutive victories: firstly, 17-year-old Ajna Kesely (three gold at the 2018 Youth Olympics) imposed her class in the 400m free, clocking 4:05.92, being closely followed by her compatriot Kristof Milak in the men's 200m butterfly (triumph in 1:53.64), namely beating Chad Le Clos (RSA), only third in 1:55.95. Milak, 20, was silver medallist in the 100m fly at the same "Duna Arena", at the 2017 Worlds in Budapest.

Italy was also well represented in the men's 100m breaststroke, where Fabio Scozzoli brilliantly won a thrilling duel with Anton Chupkov (RUS), touching finally first in 59.05, against 59.21 for the Russian. In the women's 200m backstroke, Margherita Panziera was largely better than the rest of the field, earning gold in 2:06.41. Despite the home crowd support, Katinka Hosszu (four Olympic medals in Rio 2016) had to content with the silver in 2:08.16.



Margherita Panziera (ITA) - Photo by Istvan Derencsenyi

In the men's 50m free, Ben Proud (GBR) won the dash in 21.52, while Nicholas Santos (BRA) established a new personal best (22.60) in the 50m butterfly, at 39 years old! Jeremy Desplanches, from Switzerland, confirmed his 2018 European title in the men's 200m IM, triumphing this time in 1:57.01 – against US Chase Kalisz (1:57.74), Germany's Philip Heintz (1:58.39) and China's Wang Shun (1:58.54). The last individual gold of the night went to Danas Rapsys from Lithuania (two medals at the 2018 short course Worlds in Hangzhou, China) in the men's 200m free (1:46.74). This time, Chad Le Clos could not do better than fourth and last of the race, in 1:48.82.



Nicholas Santos (BRA) - Photo by Istvan Derencsenyi

Finally, in the 4x100m free mixed – the participants in the relays are chosen by a draw and include swimmers of different nationalities in the same team -, the quartet formed by Jeremy Desplanches (SUI), Justin Ress (USA), Siobhan O'Connor (GBR) and Penny Oleksiak (CAN) was first in 3:27.63. The contribution of the Canadian star was decisive (she is the Olympic champion in the 100m free), as she clocked a very fast 54.14 to conclude the effort of the relay.



Photo by Istvan Derencsenyi

Before the start of the competition, the Opening Ceremony presented some acrobatic shows and an attractive entertainment programme, which was also provided during the finals' session and after the last event.

Welcoming all the participants in Budapest, the FINA President Dr Julio C. Maglione said: “We are again in this magnificent Hungarian capital, host of our memorable 2017 FINA World Championships! This is definitively the right place to stage our brand-new competition, attracting the best swimmers of the planet. All our Stars are thrilled to take part in an event displaying a modern and exciting sport presentation and competition format. For this first year, FINA is very happy with the way the 'Champions Swim Series' has improved the value of our Sport worldwide. Our three initial organisers – Guangzhou, Budapest, and Indianapolis – believed in our project and must receive our deepest recognition”.
