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Morozov, Qatar's next generation set for SWC final in Doha

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DOHA – More than 200 swimmers from 44 nations have descended on Doha, Qatar, for the seventh and final leg of the Swimming World Cup series. Among them is Vladimir Morozov of Russia who leads the point standings by an insurmountable margin and is destined to win the overall title for the second year in a row, along with a check for \$150,000 USD.

But comfort is relative.

Despite Morozov's cushy lead in points, he was a bit edgy at Wednesday's press conference.

"I'm freezing here, sitting under this vent," he said, referring to the air conditioning at the indoor Hamad Aquatic Centre while outside near the Aspire Dome (site of the 2023 FINA World Championships), the morning temperature was 33C and rising.

The 27-year-old quickly adapted, however.

"This is my sixth or seventh time in Qatar," Morozov said. "I'm happy to finish the World Cup here. I hope I'll finish it up on a high note."



Morozov (fourth from left) at the Doha SWC opening press conference on Wednesday. Photos (c) Aimee Berg

Since the overall title is a given, Morozov said his priority over the next three days will be to try to move up from sixth place in the “cluster” points standings. (The 2019 World Cup is divided into three clusters in which additional prize money is awarded to the winners of those subdivisions.)

“I think it’s going to be very difficult to beat Anton Chupkov, my teammate, because of his outstanding performance in the 200 breaststroke [in Kazan, Russia]. I feel that he will win this cluster, but I can try to get second place. Other than that, I’m trying to win all three events as usual: 50 free, 100 free, and 50 back.”

If Morozov succeeds, he would end the World Cup season with 20 victories 21 races. (His only loss came at the previous stop, in Kazan, where he finished second to his countryman Vladislav Grinev in the 100m freestyle.)

The hunt for the women’s title is much closer. Cate Campbell of Australia currently leads Katinka Hosszu of Hungary by 24 points. Each victory is worth 12 points -- for a maximum of 36 points because only three races count per person. But there are also bonus points at stake, and these require a separate calculation. To determine bonus points, swimmers’ times are compared to a FINA table and the faster they are, the more “performance points” they receive. Whoever earns the most “performance points” in Doha will receive 24 additional “bonus points.” The swimmer with the second-most “performance points” will earn 18 bonus points. Whoever has the third-most will receive 12.

If Hosszu prevails, she would earn her sixth World Cup title – her first since 2016. If Campbell wins, she would be the first Australian woman to claim the crown since 2008.

In addition to the well-established Olympians competing in Doha, 17 men will represent Qatar at the meet. Among them, Abdulaziz Al Obaidly, an 18-year-old who learned to swim at age 3 and made the national team at age 7.

“It wasn’t my choice,” he confessed. “My mother chose swimming to be my sport.”

But after he saw Michael Phelps win eight gold medals at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Al Obaidly was inspired. He has been training hard in Doha for the past 11 years with Yuriy Vlasov, a 1996 Olympian who represented Ukraine.

On Thursday, Al Obaidly will compete in the 100 breaststroke, followed by his best events on Friday and Saturday: the 200m individual medley and the 200 breaststroke, respectively.

“Everyone’s goal,” he said, “is to reach the Olympics. For this competition, I hope to get my best times and qualify to the finals.”



Top Qatari swimmer Abdulaziz Al Obaidly
