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YOG Singapore 2010, Day 2: China enters twice in history

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During the inaugural day of the Swimming programme at the Youth Olympic Games in Singapore, China made history on two occasions: in the men's 400m free, Jun Dai was the first ever Youth Olympic champion in Swimming, by getting the gold in 3:50.91. In the third and last final of the session, the team of China also triumphed in the mixed 4x100m free relay. For this event, never contested at an official FINA competition, the composition of the teams includes two boys and two girls, who can swim in whatever order they want. If during preliminaries, tactics changed enormously among the participating countries, in the decisive race, all the eight finalists except Hong Kong chose the formula "one boy, two girls, one boy". With equivalent strategies, China (Bowe Sun, Yi Tang, Lan Liu and Jianbin He) got the gold in 3:31.34, defeating Australia (second in 3:31.69), and France (third in 3:35.90).

"We believe this is the formula that works better. To have a boy in the final gives an additional speed at the end of the race and allows recovering if we are behind", confessed the second relay member of the Chinese team, Yi Tang. From the Australian side, Madison Wilson (the second girl to swim) gave another vision of the chosen formula: "It simply worked well in the heats, so we decided to apply it also in the final". A third point of view was delivered by Anna Santamans, the "first" girl of the French relay: "I prefer if everyone races like that, as it is fairer: girls swim against girls and boys against boys".



China's 4x100m free mixed relay - *credit: PH-SYOCOG/Neville Hew*

In one point, all the medallists agreed: this was a “very exciting and funny event”, bringing an additional energy to the swimming programme. Worth of note in this final was also the presence of a certain Medhy Metella in the French relay team: he was the first boy to swim the final for his country and is the younger brother of Malia, silver medallist in the 50m free at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens (GRE), and several times on the podium at European level. “I still haven’t called her, but when I left the starting block I had a strong thought for her. It worked well, so now we have one more medal at home”, Medhy (10 years younger than Malia) told the media after his team’s race.

Coming back to the first final of the day, the men’s 400m free, Jun Dai (born on February 6, 1992) dominated the operations from the 120m on, but was constantly followed by South Africa’s Chad Le Clos. Dai had not so good turns as Clos, but had better speed and energy in the water, so the silver was a good consolation for the South African, in 3:51.37. The bronze went to Cristian Quintero, of Venezuela, in a time of 3:53.44.



Jun Dai (CHN) - credit: SPH-SYOGOC/Desmond Wee

In terms of performances, much discussion had arisen previously to the Games on the real value of the times made in Singapore. A 3:50.91 result (the gold performance of Dai) is of course far from the World Record in the distance (3:40.07, by Paul Biedermann of Germany, established at the 2009 Worlds in Rome), but could give the eighth place at the recent European Championships, held in Budapest. Moreover, it would award a silver medal at the 2010 Junior European Championships, organised in early July in Finland. This is to say that the times achieved at these Youth Olympic Games have surely their value and represent excellent indications for athletes born in 1992, 1993 or 1994.

The second final of this inaugural day in the pool (the competition is being held at the Singapore Sports School, which welcomed many hundreds of spectators during the finals' session, witnessed by swimming legend Alexander Popov), was the women's 200m individual medley. Last at the first turn, third at the 100m and 150m-mark, Kaitlyn Jones made a remarkable freestyle leg to earn gold in 2:14.53 (better than the seventh ranked in senior Europeans this year). She was stronger than the two initial dominators of the race, Russia's Kristina Kochetkova (second, 2:15.13) and Czech Republic's representative Barbora Zavadova (third, 2:15.36).

In the remaining events of the day, the fastest of the semi-finals were:

Women's 50m breaststroke – Rachel Nicol (CAN), 32.13

Men's 100m backstroke – Yakov Toumarkin (ISR), 55.40

Women's 100m backstroke – Daryna Zevina (UKR), 1:02.57

Men's 100m breaststroke – Nicholas Schafer (AUS), 1:01.51



Kaitlyn Jones (USA) - credit: SPH-SYOGOC/Joseph Nair

Quotes of the day

"I think the way you place the swimmers and tactically how you form the team plays a very important part in the race.

That's probably one of the best parts [of the relay] with the whole crowd being on their feet and cheering loudly. I love it

and it gets all of us excited." – Justin James (AUS), silver medallist in the 4x100m free mixed relay

"I started swimming when I was three years old because my parents were swimmers on the national team for Italy. At home,

we never speak of swimming. Only in the pool." – Flavio Bizzarri (ITA), second fastest qualifier for the men's 100m

breaststroke

"I don't like my parents here because they make me nervous. They wanted to come but I said no. They are at home watching

– Barbora Zavadova (CZE), third in the women's 200m individual medley

"I was hurting towards the end but I'm happy. That was a personal best, 56 seconds, so now I'd like a medal in the final." –

Murray McDougall (RSA), qualified for the final of the men's 100m backstroke

"I feel blessed competing with these people, because these are the people trying out for the next Olympics in the near future." – Zahra Pinto, only swimmer representing Malawi at these Games
