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YOG Singapore 2010, Day 3: Swimming, Olympics & Medals – Winning combination for new countries

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There are countries that transformed the act of winning an Olympic medal in Swimming into a “normal” thing: nations like United States, Australia or Russia have in each of the stars earning an Olympic podium a swimmer of talent, but the “quantity” of success necessarily leads to routine. There are many other countries for which the winning combination “Swimming + Olympics + Medals” was never a reality. The first edition of the Youth Olympic Games, taking place in Singapore, is re-balancing the situation: if the inaugural day of finals marked the first Olympic medals in this discipline for Venezuela (Cristian Quintero, bronze in the men’s 400m free) and Czech Republic (Barbora Zavadova, third in the women’s 200m IM), the second session saw the entry of two new countries in the “Olympic club”: Israel (Yakov Toumarkin, second in the men’s 10m backstroke) and Portugal (Ana de Pinho Rodrigues, third in the women’s 50m breaststroke). This is also what the Youth Olympic Games are about: a platform for future performances at the highest level, in an atmosphere where it is possible to “breathe” some of the pressure of the traditional Olympic Games.

This feeling was highlighted by Chad Le Clos, from South Africa, winner of the men’s 200m individual medley (he had been second in the 400m free in the first day). “The experience in Singapore has been fantastic. We have to deal with the media and we must compete with the best in the world. This is precious for our preparation for London 2012,” explained the South African swimmer. At 18, Le Clos was already an athlete with a solid international reputation before coming to Singapore: in 2009, he was at the FINA World Championships in Rome (ITA), finishing the 400m IM in 16th and concluding the 200m butterfly in 17th. Some months later, at the FINA Swimming World Cup series (in 25m-pool), Le Clos earned a total of nine medals (three of each colour), mainly in the medley events.



Chad Le Clos (RSA) - credit: SPH-Syogoc/Mugilan Rajasegeran

He is not obsessed in becoming the hero of the swimming competition in Singapore. “I am a bit nervous these last days, but I try to stay focused and relaxed, preparing for each event”. In the morning, he had failed one of his goals, the final of the 200m free, when he finished the heats in ninth. “For the medley, which is my pet event, I tried to be strong in the butterfly leg and then conclude also in a powerful way in the freestyle leg”, he considered. In fact, during the race, he was first after the butterfly and backstroke sections, but after his weaker breaststroke leg, he touched third; he then recovered, and arrived first in 2:00.68, in front of Australia’s Kenneth To (2:02.51) and the second South African of the race, Dylan Bosch (2:02.59).

Asked if they are also taking some learning experiences from the cultural and educational programmes put in place for these Games, the three medallists confessed that during the swimming programme they don’t have time for many additional activities, but all “look forward to the six days after the conclusion” of the competition. “Just when we circulate throughout the Village we can appreciate all the effort done in this matter: it is really a great experience to share all these cultures and being able to meet so many friends from around the world”, considered Kenneth To.

Overall, Australia won two gold – Nicholas Schafer in the men’s 100m breaststroke and the women’s 4x100m medley relay – , while six other countries had Youth Olympic champions in this eight-final session. In the men’s 100m backstroke, Jianbin He (CHN) touched first in 55.16; Hungary’s Boglarka Kapas won the women’s 200m butterfly (2:08.72); Russia’s Andrey Ushakov made the day of attentive spectator Alex Popov by triumphing in the men’s 200m free (1:49.81); Canada’s Rachel Nicol was the best in the women’s 50m breaststroke (32.06); the Ukrainian anthem was attentively listened by track & field Sergey Bubka in the stands and by Daryna Zevina in the highest podium position, after her victory in the 100m backstroke (1:01.51); and from South Africa, the already mentioned supremacy of Chad Le Clos in the men’s 200m IM.

Quintero won the second medal for Venezuela in these Games, this time the silver in the men’s 200m free, while Spain’s Judit Ignacio was second in the women’s 200m butterfly. Norway, Italy and Germany were the remaining countries with medals during this session. The biggest upset of the day happened in the women’s 4x100m medley relay: China arrived first, but was immediately disqualified after the machine’s verdict – Lan Liu, swimming the butterfly leg, left the starting blocks 0.10 in advance of her teammate Chang Wang concluding the breaststroke section.



Hungary's Boglarka Kapas - credit: SPH-Syogoc/Selwyn Yeo

Quotes of the day

“There’s no heating, the pools are cold and we train shorter hours because of that. Our school does not encourage sports.

There are countries worse than us. We can’t complain. We may not get to see this again, the Olympic atmosphere.” - Tiana

Tasevska and Simone Marinova, swimmers representing FYR Macedonia

"I take him with me everywhere I go. I don't think I could sleep without him." – Hungary's swimmer Boglarka Kapas, who won gold in the women's 200m butterfly credits the victory to her lucky teddy bear

"My mom put me into swimming to make me fit." – India's swimmer Aaron Agnel D Souza

"Everyone around is playing football, so I decided to go a different way." - Bence Biczo (HUN), on his choice for swimming

"I got bitten by the competition bug. It was much better than I expected, I was pretty tired from the plane trip (to Singapore).

– Ana de Pinho Rodrigues (POR), bronze medal in the women's 50m breaststroke
