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Swimming World Juniors, Day 1: USA vs. Australia: two gold medals apiece

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DUBAI (United Arab Emirates), 26 August – The opening day quickly proved that the field gathered in Dubai features more quality swimmers than in any other previous editions. All four finals brought new Championship Records – and two more were set by the meet’s star Ruta Meilutyte (LTU) – while the US and Australia dominated the medal-haunt, winning two apiece of the four held. In the 400m free Mackenzie Horton (AUS) bettered the Championship Record right in the morning heats (3:50.25 – the old one was 3:50.97) and he clocked a superb time in the final where he beat James Guy (GBR) in a magnificent race. Guy went ahead right from the beginning and led by half-body length until the halfway mark. Horton switched gears and after the 250m turn he passed his British rivals. Horton was well in the lead after 300m, though Guy had a last attempt in the last 50m but the Aussie had the necessary reserves and touched the wall first, gaining a full second on Guy. His time of 3:47.12 would have been good for the 5th place at the FINA World Championships, which in fact Guy managed to take in Barcelona, recording 3:47.96 that time. Now he was a bit slower (3:48.15).

The girls’ first final (400m IM) turned out to be an all US-battle: Ella Eastin and Rebecca Mann were a cut above the rest, and their duel was a thrilling one. They went head by head in the neighbouring lanes (4 and 3), with Eastin being in the lead from the start but Mann almost caught her in the last 50m. She narrowed the gap between them to 0.24sec, though it was 0.92 after the breaststroke leg. (Worth noting that Mann took part in the open water event in Barcelona in the 10km, where she finished 8th!)

In the two relay finals, the USA vs. Australia match continued. The boys’ 4x100m free crown went to the Aussies whose quartet was simply overwhelming: their win was never in doubt and they also smashed the Championships Record by more than two seconds by clocking 3:16.96 with Mackenzie Horton bagging his second gold medal of the day! The fight for the minor spoils were rather exciting with the Russians travelling in the second position for most of the time and at the last turn Brazil was third ahead of the US, but the last American, Caeleb Dressel did a tremendous job, his 48.29sec effort would be welcomed by almost everywhere at senior level (in fact Jimmy Feigen’s homecoming leg was 48.23 in Barcelona in the second placed US relay). This secured the silver for the US here as well, the Russians had to settle for the bronze.



The boys' 4x100m free crown went to the Aussies - *credit: Giorgio Scala/Deepbluemedias*

These three nations stood on the podium after the girls' 4x200m free relay as well, but the order was switched in the top two positions. The US scored a rather convincing win – levelling the gold medal count at 2-2 this evening. It seemed a tight one only until the second leg when Kathryn McLoughlin built a massive lead and the next two even managed to extend it. Of course, it was also a new Championship Record, as the US quartet broke the 8min barrier for the first time in the event history. The medallists also deserve credit as both Australia and Russia had three 16 and one 15 year-old swimmers in their respective relays (the US had three 17 year olds).

There were two more Championships records: the star of the meet, Ruta Meilutyte (LTU) clocked 31.10 in the heats and 30.04 in the semis in the 50m breast, both are CRs – her brand new WR from Barcelona is 29.48, but she wasn't and won't be pushed to her limits by her rivals as the next one closest to her was Anna Sztankovics (HUN) with 31.10 in the afternoon.



Athletes supporting their teams during the 4x100m free boys - *credit: Rita Pannunzi/Deepbluemia*

Medallists, Day 1

Boys 400m free

1. Mackenzie Horton AUS 3:47.12 CR
2. James Guy GBR 3:48.15
3. Jan Miczka CZE 3:48.32

Girls 400m IM

1. Ella Eastin USA 4:40.02 CR
2. Rebecca Mann USA 4:40.26

3. Emily Overholt CAN 4:42.03

Boys 4x100m free

1. Australia 3:16.96 CR
(Luke Percy, Regan Leong, Jones Blake, Mackenzie Horton)
2. United States 3:19.21
(Paul Powers, Brett Ringgold, Kyle Gornay, Caeleb Dressel)
3. Russia 3:19.57
(Evgeny Sedov, Ivan Kuzmenko, Daniil Melyanenkov, Sergei Tarkhanov)

Girls 4x200m free

1. United States 7:59.42 CR
(Quinn Carozza, Kathryn McLaughlin, Katherine Drabot, Cierra Runge)
2. Australia 8:03.07
(Chelsea Gillett, Shayna Jack, Remy Fairweather, Alanna Bowles)
3. Russia 8:05.45
(Mariia Baklakova, Valriia Kolotushkina, Valeriia Salamatina, Anastasia Guzhenkova)

Championship Records in the heats and semis

Girls 50m breast
Ruta Meilutyte (LTU): heats: 31.10 – semis: 30.04

Boys 400m free

Mackenzie Horton (AUS): heats: 3:50.25
