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DWS, Montreal, Day 2: Benfeito and Gagne shine for Canada

Greg Eggert, FINA Media Committee Honorary Secretary

Women's 10m Platform

Montreal-born Meaghan Benfeito, 30, won her second gold medal of the first leg of the 2020 FINA/CNSG Diving World Series held in Montreal. She started off slow, in the first round her Back 2/12 Somersault 1 1/2 Twist in the pike position, was ranked fourth in the field of six divers. In her next dive, Benfeito nailed the Forward 3 1/2 Somersault in the pike position, the best of the round, moving her into second position. Her scores in each of the next three rounds kept her in first position. She scored three 9.0's on her fourth dive, an Armstand Back 2 Somersaults 1 1/2 Twist. Her final score was 355.10; she was the only diver to score more than 350 points. She landed on the top tier of podium on the first day of the competition and received her first gold medal in the 10m Synchro Platform event. It was the third gold medal for the Canadian team at the competition.

Benfeito considered retiring from diving after her synchronised diving partner of 11 years, Roseline Fillion retired in January of 2017. "I had a rough year losing Rosie and I was questioning everything." Her coach Arthur Miranda originally from Cuba, motivated her to continue in the sport. "I'm happy to continue diving, because I think I have a lot left in me" Benfeito insists.

Russia's Iuliia Timoshinina also started out slowly, scoring the fewest points on her Forward 3 1/2 Somersault in the first round. She scored the highest points on her third and her fifth and final dive to accumulate 347.40 points, only 7.70 points behind Benfeito. Pandelega Pamg of Malaysia earned the bronze medal. Her last dive was a Back 2 1/2 with 1 1/2 twists; she scored 56.00 points in prelims and 67.20 points in the final on that dive. It was the second medal for each diver, following Pamg's silver and Timoshinina's bronze in the 10m Synchro Platform event.



Photo by Antoine Saito

QUOTES

GOLD - Meaghan Benfeito (CAN)

“I knew I needed a decent dive to get to the score I needed to qualify for the Olympic Games. I needed fifteen points. But to get that close, at the very first competition of the year, I’m pretty satisfied with that and now I can head back to training and work on that last dive. I knew I was diving pretty well in this competition. My first dive wasn’t as well done but it was still in the zone to get the points. The fourth dive is my best dive. I know I can do it well and to nail it like that, in competition, at home, it’s a great feeling. I wasn’t looking at the scoreboard, I didn’t know how

“I was pretty stressed for the entire event. The fans were loud. I was hearing them scream, it gave me butterflies in my stomach. I hadn’t felt like that in a while in competition. Normally, I’m pretty good at dealing with stress, and I think it’s important to learn from this. It happens. Yes, I am disappointed but it’s a take-away for me. It’s not a bad thing to live through this type of situation, you never know what’s going to happen. I certainly don’t wish it happens again, so I will try and fix this as best I can. You learn when you lose, not when you win. Yes, I won, yes, I got gold, I had a good performance but it’s not the performance I was hoping for. But I’ll learn from this.”

“It was a really great start. When I feel the adrenaline, I run a lot faster, I jump a lot higher. I don’t do that in training, I haven’t been over rotating in the last few months. When there’s no adrenaline, it’s normally straight. It’s a tough one for me.”

“It doesn’t change plans for training. We’re going to continue to train with the Olympics in mind.”

SILVER - Iuliia Timoshinina (RUS)

“I’m good, I’m very happy for today. I was pleased with my programme today. I finished with two medals and my teammates are also diving well.”

BRONZE - Pandelesa Pamg (MAS)

“My final was much better than my semis. I didn’t think about anything specific and just focused on myself. I practice a lot so I don’t have to overthink my dives when competing. I’m happy that I could improve on my last dive in the final, but I know I can still do better.”

Men's 3m Springboard

Powered by Philippe Gagne, Canada picked up their second gold medal of the day and the fourth of the Montreal World Series to lead the medals table. Gagne and Jack Laugher of Great Britain were impressive, and in fact identical in their scores on the same first dive for each. Both men scored 81.60 points in their execution of the Forward 2 1/2 Somersault with 2 Twists and were tied after the first round. The comparisons stopped after that round, when the 22-year-old Gagne delivered the performance of his career. He had never won an individual World Series medal of any colour in his life, and today he was crowned the champion. In fact, so rare was a performance like this, the last time a Canadian male had won a gold medal was ten years ago when Alexandre Despatie struck gold in Veracruz, Mexico. It was a fitting performance for

Leap Day in the Leap Year of 2020.

Montreal-born Gagne had the highest points tally after each of the six rounds. Following his tie with Laugher in the first round, his score in the second round was equalled by Juan Manuel Celaya Hernandez, but Gagne would decisively win the six round match accumulating 471.30 points. Laugher, 25 was visibly disappointed following his final dive, delivering the worst of the sixth round, but he held onto the silver medal, finishing a distant 40.25 points behind the newly minted Canadian Golden Boy who hails from Ville Mont-Royal, Quebec.

Gagne won a silver medal on the 10m platform and a bronze medal on the 3m springboard at the 2014 Summer Youth Olympics. He was selected as a member of the Canadian Olympic team for the 2016 Games in Rio. He progressed through the preliminary and semi-final rounds, finishing 11th in the final with a score of 425.30 in the 3m springboard event.

It was the second medal of the Montreal World Series for Laugher following Friday's silver medal in the 3m Synchro Springboard. Finishing in third place was Michael Hixon of the USA who accumulated 425.65 points to earn his and the USA's first medal of the competition. Hixon's mother Mandy was on the US national diving team from 1980 to 1984 and his father coached basketball for 42 years at Amherst College. Michael was encouraged to take up both sports at an early age and chose to pursue diving in his freshman year of high school.



Photo by Antoine Saito

QUOTES

GOLD - Philippe Gagne (CAN)

“My focus certainly showed up today! The semifinals really gave me confidence for the final. I would say that normally, when I make a World Series final, a podium isn’t impossible but it’s still very very difficult. But I think that winning the semifinal today really gave me confidence for tonight’s final. To win it by 40 points? I wasn’t expecting that. This is actually my first individual medal and to start with gold, it’s a little bit weird. I would say this is a big day in my career, especially since this is the first competition of the season. We weren’t expecting results like this. Not only I am leaving with gold, I am leaving with two really consistent scores, 474 and 471, both are great scores for me, especially at the international level. It’s a great day.”

“I knew that if I nailed the dive, the gold medal was waiting for me. Just like I know I can do it. It’s what we do in practice, hundreds of times, so that in competition, we’re totally comfortable with it. In the end, you just don’t want to make a little mistake. Starting the season like this, it bodes well for the rest and it shows that I can dive under pressure and it’s something that I’ll need at the World Cup. The stakes are high and I will need to manage my stress, just like I did today.”

“When you’re only six divers and you hear the scores, you do the math in your head and you know where you are situated on the scoreboard. So it’s hard not to look at the scores. I try to focus on my own performance, I try not to let the scoreboard dictate how I am going to dive. For sure if I dive isn’t as good, it’s going to play on my brain but at the end of the day, you have to do one dive at a time.”

“I spent a lot of time in the gym before Christmas. Particularly for my front 4 and half, because it’s a dive that requires more strength given my height. I spent a lot of time doing squats!”

SILVER - Jack Laugher (GBR)

“I wasn’t pleased with my last dive, but I’m happy to get a medal here. Last season I started off the World Series with two bronze medals and still ended up at the top of the 2019 rankings in 3m springboard. There’s work to be done and I’m happy to do it.”

BRONZE - Mike Hixon (USA)

“I love diving in Montreal and just to be on the podium with those guys is a great honour. They’re great divers. I feel good, for this early in the season. It’s a great starting point and it gives me confidence, so we’ll go from here.”

Mixed 10m Synchro Platform

The Russians won another gold medal in a synchro event and claimed their third gold medal of the Montreal World Series scoring 315.96 points to defeat the Mexican and Canadian squads. The Mexican pair were less than five points off the Russian leaders and the Canadians were less than 10 points behind the winners, and for their efforts they earned a silver and a bronze medal in the mixed 10m synchro platform event.

Viktor Minibaev won his second gold medal to go with the victory in Friday's 10m Synchro Platform and teammate Ekaterina Beliaeva can add this gold to the bronze medal she won in the 10m Synchro Platform on the first day of competition. These were the second medals for the Canadian pair. On Friday, Riendeau earned a bronze medal in the 10m Synchro Platform and McKay was golden in the 10m Platform.



Photo by Antoine Saito

QUOTES

GOLD – RUSSIA

Viktor Minibaev: “Our performance was good. In the last dive we made a small mistake which was not so good. But the next time it will be better. We are happy with our performances in Montreal.”

SILVER – MEXICO

Jose Balleza Isaias: “We feel very comfortable diving here in Canada and thank the organising committee for putting on a great event. We have been training hard and we are always excited to go out and represent Mexico.”

Marie Jose Sanchez Moreno: “We were very happy with the result. It’s always fun to watch a guy and girl diving together, we’re really hoping that the event can be included in the Olympic programme in the future.”

BRONZE - CANADA

Vincent Riendeau: “Caeli dives the same list in mixed she does with Meaghan so we need as little adjustment as possible. She’s one of the girls that jumps the highest, so I don’t really have to adapt that much! There were only four teams but all very strong teams so we’re happy with the result. We weren’t able to practice as much as we would have wanted before the event. We only made a few little adjustments before the competition. We’re still happy despite a bad third dive. But we came back strong. We know we can stay in the game and push to climb as high as we can.”

Caeli McKay: “It was a very positive way to finish the day, I wanted to have fun with Vincent, I wanted to show my fans what I’m capable of doing. Even though I missed my third dive, I went for it so I have no regrets and we had fun today. That’s all we really care about. Vince jumps really high so that was one of the reasons I think I missed my third dive. I was trying to give him some space rather than cut it down. But it’s really relaxed with him, he’s a really chill guy. It’s not that different but I do have to jump a little more with him.”



Photo by Antoine Saito

MEDAL TABLES

Female Medallists after Day 2:

Benfeito -- CAN - 10m Synchro Platform G & 10m Platform G

McKay -- CAN - 10m Platform G & Mixed 10m Synchro Platform B
Timoshinina -- RUS - 10m Synchro Platform B & 10m Platform S
Beliaeva -- RUS - 10m Synchro Platform B & Mixed 10m Synchro Platform G
Pang -- MAS - 10m Synchro Platform S & 10m Platform B
Leong -- MAS - 10m Synchro Platform S
Abel -- CAN - 3m Synchro Springboard G
Citrini Beaulieu -- CAN - 3m Synchro Springboard G
Espinosa Sanchez -- MEX - 3m Synchro Springboard S
Hernandez Torres -- MEX - 3m Synchro Springboard S
Ilinykh -- RUS - 3m Synchro Springboard B
Poliakova -- RUS - 3m Synchro Springboard B
Sanchez Moreno -- MEX - Mixed 10m Synchro Platform S

Male Medallists after Day 2:

Bondar -- RUS - 10m Synchro Platform G
Minibaev -- RUS - 10m Synchro Platform G & Mixed 10m Synchro Platform G
Berlin Reyes -- MEX - 10m Synchro Platform S
Garcia Navarro -- MEX - 10m Synchro Platform S
Riendeau -- CAN - 10m Synchro Platform B & Mixed 10m Synchro Platform B
Zsombor-Murray -- CAN - 10m Synchro Platform B
Kuznetsov -- RUS - 3m Synchro Springboard G
Shleikher -- RUS - 3m Synchro Springboard G
Goodfellow -- GBR - 3m Synchro Springboard S
Laugher -- GRB - 3m Synchro Springboard S & 3m Springboard S
Castillo Huerta -- MEX - 3m Synchro Springboard B
Celaya Hernandez -- MEX - 3m Synchro Springboard B

Gagne -- CAN - 3m Springboard G

Hixon -- USA - 3m Springboard B

Ballesa Isaias -- MEX - Mixed 10m Synchro Platform S



Photo by Antoine Saito

Medals won by Country in the Montreal World Series after Day 2:

Canada - Four Gold & Two Bronze - 6 medals

Russia - Three Gold, One Silver & Two Bronze - 6 medals

Mexico - One Bronze & Three Silver - 4 medals

Malaysia - One Silver & One Bronze - 2 medals

Great Britain - Two Silver - 2 medals

USA - One Bronze - 1 medal

Events on Day 3 – March 1

Women's 3m springboard
Men's 10m platform
Mixed 3m springboard synchro

2020 FINA/CNSG Diving World Series calendar:

1. Montreal (CAN) – February 28-March 1
 2. Kazan (RUS) – March 20-22
 3. London (GBR) – March 27-29
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