FINA GALA: Crowning the stars of 2015
FINA Communication Department

A man and a woman for each of FINA’s six disciplines have been awarded tonight in Budapest, Hungary, on the occasion of the second edition of the FINA World Aquatics Gala - "Soirée des Etoiles", an evening paying tribute to the great aquatic stars of 2015. An additional award was presented for the best swimming performances of the year.

The winners have been chosen through a selection process which looks at the points collected at the most important FINA events and according to the athletes’ respective ranking. In swimming, World Records points were also taken into consideration.

The annual ceremony, held in a prestigious and iconic venue alongside the Danube river, the Vigado concert Hall, was also highlighted with the presence of VIP personalities, such as ANOC, OCA and Olympic Solidarity President Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Sabah, Mayor of Budapest and Head of the FINA World Championships 2017 Organising Committee Istvan Tarlos, Mayor of Windsor Drew Dilkens, Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on Sport Development and Peace (UNOSDP) Wilfried Lemke, and influential Olympic writer Alan Abrahamson (last year’s winner of the FINA World Journalist Award).

In his opening speech, FINA President said: “The athletes deserve our deepest recognition and appreciation for what they are doing to raise and consolidate the FINA image and the values of our sport.”

He added: “But behind each of them, we also pay a fair tribute to their coaches. Their role is essential and their devotion to their athletes and to the sport they love is a significant part of FINA’s success.”

In front of approximately 300 guests, including key sports leaders, National Federations’ representatives, and a wide range of local, national and international media, the following athletes received FINA’s recognition:
Swimming

Men

Mitchell Larkin

Women

Katinka Hosszu

Swimming

Best Swimming

Adam Peaty
Katie Ledecky

Performance
Water Polo

Men

Serbia
Player: captain Zivko Gocic

Women

USA
Player: captain Maggie Steffens

Diving

Men

He Chao

Women

Shi Tingmao
**Synchro**

**Men**
- Bill May
- Aleksandr Maltsev

**Women**
- Svetlana Romashina

**Open Water**

**Men**
- Jordan Willimovsky

**Women**
- Ana Marcela Cunha
Gary Hunt

Men

High Diving

Rachelle Simpson

Women

The following coaches were also rewarded on the occasion:

- Shane Tusup (coach of Katinka Hosszu)
- Alex Rochas (coach of Gary Hunt)
- Dejan Savic (coach of Ziko Gocić)
- Adam Krikorian (coach of Maggie Steffens)
- Nie Yudi (coach of He Chao)
- Zhao Wenjing (coach of Shi Tingmao)
- Chris Caver (coach of Bill May)
- Gana Maximova (coach of Aleksandr Mal’tsev)
- Tatiana Danchenko (coach of Svetlana Romashina)
- Michael Bohl (coach of Mitch Larkin)
- Jason Carlton (coach of Rachelle Simpson)
- Dave Kelsheimer (coach of Jordan Willimovsky)
- Fernando Possenti (coach of Ana Marcela Cunha)
- Bruce Gemmell (coach of Katie Ledecky)
- Melanie Marshall (coach of Adam Peaty)
The FINA World Journalist Award 2015 was given to Stefano Arcobelli (ITA) from La Gazzetta dello Sport for his great contribution to the promotion of aquatics in the last 20 years. Following the ceremony, FINA gathered fresh reactions from the winners that were on-site:

**Water Polo Best Male Team**

Serbia - Player: captain Zivko Gocic: “It is a very big honour and pleasure to receive this award tonight. I want to thank my FINA friends and I hope to get more awards in the future. Now we have one more dream, the Olympic title, this would be a dream come true.”

**Diving Best Male Athlete**

He Chao (CHN): “I have been training for two years every single day so it is a great consecration. It has been difficult to manage my schedule between my training and my piano lessons (He Chao did a piano performance during the Gala).”
Diving Best Female Athlete

Shi Tingmao (CHN): “It is so important for me tonight to receive this award after all these years of competition. It is the first time I receive such an award. My goal for 2015 was definitely the 3m springboard and the synchro event, while the 1m was more of a side event. China’s technical level in diving has always been really high. Now we focus on Rio 2016.”

Synchronised Swimming Best Male Athletes (two winners with equal points)

Bill May (USA): “Two years ago I would never have imagined winning this award today because the mixed duet was not even on the programme. This comes as a complete surprise to me. I have had dream partners and amazing coaches without who I wouldn’t be here today. All their support has been so precious. I think my performances in Vegas have helped me getting ready for the Worlds. It has giving me the opportunity to perform in front of a large crowd and be more athletic and in tune with the requirement of the World Championships. Kazan was incredible because I was in front of my family, my first and current coaches.”

Synchronised Swimming Best Female Athlete

Svetlana Romashina (RUS): “It was amazing to win in Kazan in front of my family and my husband. I have worked hard every day up to 10 hours a day so we had an advantage on other countries. As the Russian team already secured a place in the Olympics, my 2016 focus is the Games - the duet and team routine.”
High Diving Best Male Athlete

Gary Hunt (GBR): “This award is very special to me. It is great to take part in this evening as usually when I receive a medal I am in my speedo’s and still out of breath. The inclusion of High Diving in the FINA World Championships programme was a great moment as it marked the sport’s acceptance within the elite aquatic sports. As long as there is water, I’m ready to dive from anywhere to give it a go.”

Unfortunately, due to their tight Olympic training programme, the following athletes could not attend the Gala but sent a personal message.
Mitch Larkin (Swimming, AUS), U.S. Water Polo Women’s Team (player: captain Maggie Steffens), Jordan Willimovsky (Open Water, USA), Ana Marcela Cunha (Open Water, BRA), Rachelle Simpson (High Diving, USA)

Video of FINA Aquatics Gala Budapest - Messages of the athletes