Fun, fitness and friendship (even marriage)
Gergely Csurka, FINA Media Committee Member (HUN)

The brilliant competition of the two oldest divers took our hearts. But there were more heartwarming moments: just as in Rio last year (that time in the diving venue), a marriage proposal on the synchro pooldeck highlighted the day.

The ladies don’t fear anything. They did it from 1m, fine. Then from 3m, OK. But they also climbed up to the 5m platform to show their three dives apiece. At the age 87 and 86. This is one of the nicest duels in Masters diving, as usually only the two ladies compete in the age-group category of 85-89. This time Ibo de Belausteguigoitia won two golds (1m, 5m), while Lois Wood earned one in the 3m.

Though Ibo represents a US club and Lois a Canadian, they actually belong to the US Masters diving family (quite an active one, a 48-member strong team arrived from the States).

“We don’t have a large diving community so I usually go to competitions to the US, twice a year” Lois explained.
Just to put them into perspective, 1947 – good God, 70 years ago... – was a milestone for both of them. Ibo started diving while Lois took part in her first national championships. Ibo, born in Spain (with Basque origins), that time living in Mexico, soon found herself in the national team and took part in the Olympics in London in the following year. Soon both of them stopped diving. Ms. Belausteguigoitia started her studies and soon spent a longer period in Japan and in France, while Ms. Wood gave birth to her children.

While she returned to the boards soon, Ibo rediscovered the once beloved sport 34 years later. But since then she has been part of the show.

Though diving is a tough sport and can really test the body, these ladies are happy to stand on the boards and platforms. For them, diving is a way of life.

“It’s a sport where you have to think a lot and feel your body, so it makes you live better” says Ibo who practices on a daily basis back home, from Monday to Friday.

“Diving keeps your body tight. During a dive, you always have to be aware where you are, take care of your moves.”

And of course, compared to the good old days, for example London 1948, today’s equipment is friendlier to the divers.

“That time we had wooden boards. These ones make jumping easy” she adds.
Lois sums it up nicely. “It’s about fun, fitness and friendship.”

In Canada she also took up skiing for a while as it provided somewhat similar feeling when flying through the air, still, diving is the sport she ‘kept’.

Lois now is accompanied by her granddaughter to the bigger meets, who admittedly feels intimidated while watching diving (not just her grandma). But she quickly learnt her grandmother’s governing principle, as far as your body is concerned: “kind of use it or lose it.” And Ms. Wood does use her body, also has workouts on a daily basis. Again, fine role-models for any youngsters.

As for setting examples, the local Organising Committee members are doing their best, too. Two days ago we wrote on Janos Kormos, who followed her daughter to the diving boards – he is also part of the discipline’s competition management.

Otto Kiss, who oversees the Masters event’s operations, took part in the open water swimming event and completed the 3km course (then hailed those who battled with the waves which he never had to do as a former water polo player). Two-time Olympic champion Attila Vari, who is also member of the Masters organising team, is part of the famous Millenium side which is en route to win the 40+ category in water polo (yesterday the ticked the quarter-finals).

And last but not least we have to present Julia Kiss, the competition director of the Masters synchro meet who just clinched the world title in duet yesterday (with Julia Gyori). This was a historical first for Hungary: a synchro gold medal at the World Championships, even if among the Masters.

Ah, and just one more story from the magnificent venue at the Varosliget. Do you remember the scene from Rio where soon after winning the silver medal in the women’s 3m event, Chinese diver He Zi was surprised with a marriage proposal from fellow diver Qin Kai during her podium presentation.
The same happened in Budapest: duet silver medallist Dorottya Kovacs received a proposal from her boyfriend Martin Hettinger, soon after the victory ceremony. And the end was also the same: a definite yes, prompting huge applause from the audience.