

Published on *fina.org* - Official FINA website (<https://www.fina.org>)

OWS, Past winners: Cunha (BRA) and Lurz (GER), the shiniest stars

FINA Communications Department

Since the introduction of the “FINA Best Athletes of the Year” award in 2010 – a formal gala is organised only since 2014 – 11 open water swimming stars have so far been consecrated, six among men and five in the women’s category.

The list of male winners is somehow more diversified, with Thomas Lurz (GER) being the only one getting the prize in more than one occasion (2011 and 2013). The German ace is one of the best open water swimmers in the history of the discipline, after collecting 13 medals at the FINA World Championships and an additional seven at the FINA World Open Water Swimming Championships. His 2011 accolade followed a brilliant performance at the Shanghai Worlds, where he got gold in the 5km, silver in the 10km and a bronze in the 5km team event. In 2013, he was even more impressive, with four podium presences at the Barcelona rendezvous: gold in the 25km and 5km team event, silver in the 10km, and bronze in the 5km.



Thomas Lurz (GER) - Photo by deepbluemedias

In 2010, Valerio Cleri (ITA) was rewarded by his first place in the 10km and 25km runner-up position at the FINA World

Open Water Swimming Championships in Roberval (CAN), while the 2012 prize went to Oussama Mellouli, from Tunisia, Olympic champion at the London Olympic Games. Came 2014, and Allan do Carmo (BRA) was the athlete to watch, with the overall victory in the FINA 10km Marathon Swimming World Cup series.

The Kazan 2015 World Championships certainly left pleasant memories to Jordan Wilimovsky, from USA, who won the 10km race in the Kazanka river and the FINA recognition at the end of the year. Finally, the triumph of Ferry Weertman (NED) at the large of Copacabana Beach at the Rio 2016 Olympics was decisive for last year's recognition.

Cunha, a legend

Among women, Ana Marcela Cunha, from Brazil, is an example of excellence and longevity. Out of the seven prizes awarded so far, she won the title of "Best Athlete of the Year" on three occasions: 2010, 2014 and 2015. She has nine medals at the FINA World Championships, and an additional bronze at the FINA World Open Water Swimming Championships. It was precisely the latter, at the 2010 competition in Roberval, plus the overall title in the 10km World Cup series that "gave" the first "Best Athlete" recognition to the Brazilian great.

In 2014, she is also the first of the FINA 10km annual circuit, while in 2015 she wins the 25km, she is second in the 5km team event, and gets another bronze in the 10km of the Kazan showcase.



Ana Marcela Cunha (BRA) - Photo by deepbluemedias

In 2011, Keri-Anne Payne (GBR), is the best of the year and the winner of the 10km race at the Worlds in Shanghai (CHN), while Eva Risztov, from Hungary, surprisingly collects gold at the 2012 Olympic Games in London.

Poliana Okimoto, another Brazilian star, has her glory hour in 2013, after standing on three occasions at the Barcelona World Championships' podium. She earns gold in the 10km, silver in the 5km and bronze in the team event.

2016 was definitively the year for the Netherlands in the discipline, with a double Olympic victory at the Rio Games. Quite naturally, Sharon van Rouwendaal was happy to meet her compatriot Ferry Weertman in last year's Gala held in Windsor (CAN).

List of past winners*

Men

2010 – Valerio Cleri (ITA)
2011 – Thomas Lurz (GER)
2012 – Oussama Mellouli (TUN)
2013 – Thomas Lurz (GER)
2014 – Allan do Carmo (BRA)
2015 – Jordan Wilimovsky (USA)
2016 – Ferry Weertman (NED)

Women

2010 – Ana Marcela Cunha (BRA)
2011 – Keri-Anne Payne (GBR)
2012 – Eva Risztov (HUN)
2013 – Poliana Okimoto (BRA)
2014 – Ana Marcela Cunha (BRA)
2015 – Ana Marcela Cunha (BRA)
2016 – Sharon van Rouwendaal (NED)

**The FINA World Aquatics Gala “Soirée des Etoiles” has been successively organised in Doha (QAT, 2014), Budapest*

(HUN, 2015), and Windsor (CAN, 2016).
