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## FINA Best Male Artistic Swimmer 2017: Aleksandr Maltsev (RUS)



**Aleksandr, you are a lucky man! You have already successfully performed with two wonderful partners – Darina**

**Valitova and Mikhaela Kalancha. Are they very much alike?**

Darina and Mikhaela are like oil and vinegar. Darina is impulsive and hot-blooded. As for me, I'm calm and steady. As they say, opposites attract. So we made a good duet, notwithstanding the fact that we worked together only for half a year before Kazan 2015. At first we had some problems with synchronisation, but then we stuck together and it was very comfortable to perform with her. At the same time Darina wanted to do the team routine at the Rio Olympics, so she decided to focus on group training. That's why I needed a new partner. Mikhaela is more quiet and even-tempered than I am. On the one hand it was easier to work with her, on the other – more complicated. I can say mostly I had to adapt myself to her and lead the dance. In the case of Darina it was a mutual process. I also had to control the situation in duet more carefully: to watch Mikhaela's mistakes, to point out the inaccuracies, because she can be up in the clouds. Generally speaking, I was not only a partner, I was a mentor as well.

**“Such a delicate situation can rock the boat”**

**Did the coaches take into account your opinion when choosing a partner for you?**

Darina was appointed by the mixed duet coach, Gana Maksimova. She had already worked with me. She also helped Team Russia to prepare for the FINA Trophy, so she had an idea of the candidates for the mixed duet. At least visually. She voted for Darina Valitova. Everyone in the team felt comfortable with that choice. The next season there were several candidates, I tried to pair up with some synchro girls. Finally Mikhaela was nominated. My opinion was taken into account. But it was head coach Tatiana Pokrovskaya who affirmed the candidacy.

**Is it true that you and Mikhaela had an affair?**

Yes, it is. We had a romance last year when we were preparing for the European Championships. But now we are just friends.

**Was it difficult to combine personal and professional life and then to get through a break-up?**

I agree that such a delicate situation can rock the boat. There are so many examples in figure skating. But it depends on the people involved. If you have the same motivation and the shared sense of purpose, nothing can disturb your plans. You have to put all extra feelings and emotions aside and pursue your goal.

**“Actually, nobody blamed us”**

**You had an improvisation mixed duet exhibition with Virginie Dedieu in the training pool in Budapest. How did it**

**happen?**

Virginie Dedieu was in Budapest as a coach of Team Spain. She just came to swim and we executed some elements on impulse. Not even experienced duets are able to perform such tricky elements. But we suited each other and did everything from the first attempt. Virginie was an outstanding soloist. She also took part in the mixed duet competition in Kazan. Her accomplishments earn her respect. I think this was one of the most unforgettable moments of Budapest for me.

**And what about your performance? Did you feel satisfied?**

Not a hundred per cent. Things did not come around as they were expected. And we had in view two gold medals – both in Kazan and Budapest. So we'll keep working hard to fulfil our goals.

**What does it mean for a Russian synchro swimmer to win silver? Is it estimated a defeat?**

Actually, nobody blamed us. On the contrary, the coaches and fans tried their best to support and to encourage us. Besides, I don't feel like it was a failure or a defeat. We showed a great performance. And I'm not alone in my conclusions.

**“We can see a huge progress”**

**What can you say about the skill level of your rivals?**

We can see a huge progress, comparing Kazan and Budapest. FINA made a resolution about the mixed duets just half a year before the World Championships in 2015. It was hard to achieve a high quality through this period. Some countries doubted their participation and made a final decision too late. They had very little time to train and to prepare good performances. It was like a trial tournament. But the situation changed in Budapest greatly. The number of participating duets increased and the skill level as well. I liked the Brazilian mixed duet. We got acquainted during our traditional training camp in Brazil and gave them a master class. I must say the programmes they executed at Worlds were very nice: with good choreography and personal style.

**We could hardly imagine a few years ago that there would be mixed duet competitions at the World or European**

**Championships. Do you believe you will have a chance to take part in the Olympic Games one day?**

I hope so. They should include mixed duets in the Olympic programme. Synchronised swimming is no longer just a female sport. Still, we have two women's events in the schedule. It's a kind of gender discrimination. Of course, I understand the reason. Not so many countries are involved in the men's or mixed competition. And we need to increase the level of the participants. At the same time the integration of mixed duet in the Olympic programme would give a boost to this discipline. Sports officials have to think in the long term.

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