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FINA pays tribute to the Best of 2018!

FINA Communications Department

The best Aquatic athletes of 2018 across FINA's disciplines were awarded tonight (December 16) in Hangzhou (CHN), as the 14th FINA World Swimming Championships (25m) came to an end earlier the same evening after six-day of thrilling pool action during which nine World Records were broken.

10 elite athletes (five men and five women), two teams, their respective coaches, two masters athletes and a media award were distributed during the inspiring fifth edition of the annual FINA World Aquatics Gala 2018 "Soirée des Etoiles".

The **FINA Male Swimmer 2018** award was won by **Chad Le Clos, from South Africa**. Though this season he wasn't as

overwhelming in the World Cup as in the previous seasons, instead, he showed his tremendous class at the World Swimming Championships in Hangzhou. By claiming a gold and two silvers in his pet butterfly events, he also earned a precious bronze medal in the 100m free, a decisive outcome when selecting the Best of 2018.



The **FINA Female Swimmer 2018** award was presented to **Katinka Hosszu, from Hungary**, one of the great champions

of the current era who returned to the top and became the best swimmer among the ladies for the fourth time in her career. This year, she started shining already in the World Cup Series and staged a great duel with Sarah Sjöström. Though she finished second in the overall ranking, in Hangzhou, she was the best female swimmer of the competition, earning an amazing set of medals: gold in the 200m fly, 100m, 200m and 400m IM, and silver in the 100m back.



The **FINA Male Water Polo Team 2018** award went to **Hungary**. The Magyars made the most out of the FINA events this season. In the World League Super Final they clinched the silver medal after losing a thrilling final to Montenegro in a

penalty shootout. However, their young team managed to bounce back for the FINA World Cup, beating the powerful Serbs in the semis – for the first time in a knockout game since the 2004 Olympic final – and went on to clinch the title by defeating Australia.

The **FINA Female Water Polo Team 2018** award was given to **USA**. The North American squad stood atop the podium in

every event they entered during the year - including their 12th FINA World League title and their third FINA World Cup crown in a row. During the process, they lost one game in the Intercontinental tournament but that was followed by 15 straight victories, including wins over Australia and Russia in the respective FINA finals. The golden run of this team has been lasting since 2014, as they have won all 10 big tournaments held over the past five years.

The **FINA Male Artistic Swimmer 2018** award went to **Giorgio Minisini, from Italy**. **The Italian** had another fine season

with plenty of good results together with his partner Manila Flamini. Their first place in the mixed duet overall in the FINA World Series earned him this award once again after 2017. Though this time he doesn't have to share it as two gold medals in the World Series, clinched in Tokyo and Los Angeles and two silvers claimed in Paris and Syros Island placed the Italian duet atop in the cumulative rankings.



The **FINA Female Artistic Swimmer 2018** award was presented to **Yelizaveta Yakhno, from Ukraine**. This brilliant

athlete finished in a tie with Japan's Yukiko Inui at the top of the FINA World Series standings in both the solo and the duet. But she broke the tie as a member of the winning Team. In solo, she was first in Los Angeles and won silver medals in Paris, Budapest and Surrey, while in duet she also had three silvers and was the best in Budapest.



The **FINA Male High Diver 2018** award was given to **Gary Hunt, from Great Britain**. The king of the discipline returned

to his throne by winning his third straight World Cup title. After missing the top spot a year ago at the FINA World Championships, he was superior once more, especially on the second day of the grand final in Abu Dhabi (UAE). His signature dive - the "Triple Quad" - couldn't have been any better and that secured him the World Cup gold and ultimately his third award in the year-ending gala.



The **FINA Female High Diver 2018** award was won by **Rhiannan Iffland, from Australia**, the same great athlete who

won the year's top event just as in 2017. The Aussie who entered her first FINA meet last season, quickly conquered the women's field: after winning the world title in Budapest in 2017, this November she added her first World Cup title to her treasury in Abu Dhabi. She led all the way, even producing the only 100-point dive of the meet so she rightfully earned her second straight distinction as the best high diver of the year.



The **FINA Male Open Water Swimmer 2018** award went to **Ferry Weertman, from the Netherlands**, the competitor

who offered the most balanced performance over the eight legs of the FINA Marathon Swim World Series. He won the opening race in Doha, came second in Balatonfured and finished in the top seven in each event he entered. This record secured first place in the overall standings for the reigning Olympic and world champion.



The **FINA Female Open Water Swimmer 2018** award was given to **Ana Marcela Cunha, from Brazil**, a swimmer whose

overall win in the FINA Marathon Swim World Series put her to the top of the scoring list. Her victories in Balatonfured (HUN) and Lac St. Jean (CAN), along with a silver medal from the Seychelles and a bronze from Chun'an (CHN) placed her atop of the scoring list. It means that after 2010, 2014, 2015 and last season - she is the year's best for the fifth time!



The **FINA Male Diver 2018** award was presented to **Cao Yuan, from China**, a great diver who last won this award in 2014

but is back on top again after another brilliant season. He captured two gold medals and two silvers in the in the 3m springboard event in FINA World Series to capture the individual overall title, ahead of his synchro partner Xie Siyi. Together they were unbeaten in the entire season and won the World Series overall and the World Cup as well. He finished second in the World Cup to Siyi but his World Series wins were enough to secure him this award.



The **FINA Female Diver 2018** award went to **Shi Tingmao, from China**, one of the most outstanding divers in history who

became the best of the year for the fourth time in a row as she continued her dominance in the 3m springboard. She enjoyed another perfect season, won all four individual golds and the overall title in the FINA World Series, and with her partner Chang Yani she finished first in the 3m synchro as well. She added two more golds at the FINA World Cup.



In addition, China's Xu Jiayu received a special prize: the "Best Breakthrough Athlete of China".

The Media Award was given to AIPS (International Sports Press Association), namely to its very successful "Young Reporters Programme".



Finally, the Mayor of Hangzhou, Mr Xu Liyi, received the "FINA Excellence Award" for the outstanding organisation of the 14th FINA World Swimming Championships.

On the occasion, FINA President Julio C. Maglione said: "2018 has been a memorable year for FINA! We have celebrated our 110th anniversary and we have inaugurated our Headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland. Many of you were in the House of Aquatics last July and could enjoy this very special moment in our history!"

Dr Maglione then highlighted the performances of the FINA athletes throughout the year. "At these FINA World Swimming Championships (25m), but also during our top annual events, their effort and commitment make Aquatics bigger and more recognised in the Olympic world", he concluded.

Giorgio Minisini (ITA) – Best Male Artistic Swimmer 2018

“I have already been once in Hangzhou and I very much like this city. Concerning my award, it is a recognition for all the effort we put into our training and competition. The World Trophy is a demanding competition, where we need to travel a lot in a short period of time. But we need to do this if we want one day to reach the Olympic status. On my plans for Gwangju 2019, we are now working a bit differently than for Budapest 2017. We have a new choreography, with more speed and more connection between the two swimmers, which is one of the main goals of FINA for the evolution of the mixed duet”.

Yelizaveta Yakhno (UKR) – Best Female Artistic Swimmer 2018

“It’s always very nice and rewarding to receive this prize, but on top of the stage I always feel a bit embarrassed. This will certainly give me additional motivation for my career, and my coaches are deeply convinced that in the years to come the level of Ukraine will significantly raise”.

Ferry Weertman (NED) – Best Male Open Water Swimmer 2018

“It feels really great to receive this recognition. It’s the second time for me, as I had the same award after my Olympic title in Rio, in 2016. It’s my first visit to Hangzhou, but I have been already in China, namely in Chun’An for the legs of the Marathon Swim World Series. I am here for the last nine days and I had the opportunity to watch all the swimming Championships in a very nice venue. There was a great atmosphere there!”

Ana Marcela Cunha (BRA) – Best Female Open Water Swimmer 2018

“I’ve been a lot of times in China, competing in open water races. However, it’s my first time in Hangzhou, a city that I find very beautiful and full of light. In 2019, the focus is naturally the FINA World Championships in Korea, and something very important is changing there: the water is a bit warmer, so I need to prepare differently for it. I will for sure swim in all individual events (5km, 10km and 25km), and I’ll concentrate on the 10km, as this will be a qualification event for Tokyo 2020. I always try to think on one competition at the time, so if I eventually qualify for the Olympics I still don’t think too much on how it will actually be in Japan”.

Cao Yuan (CHN) – Best Male Diver 2018

“It’s the second time I won the award, but back then there was no Gala. I had my speech ready, but nothing happened... This time, I felt excited to finally speak in the Gala. That made me very nervous, even more nervous than when I am competing. This year, I still consider that I haven’t performed at my best. I need to improve, as I do both springboard and platform. Gwangju 2019 is very important, as this is one of the major meets where our national selection for the Tokyo 2020 Games will be made”.

Shi Tingmao (CHN) – Best Female Diver 2018

“It’s great to win my fourth award and I am expecting already my fifth one! I won all the events I could this year, but I need to still improve some details – my strength and my injuries. The winter training is very important for me, as we prepare for Gwangju 2019 and for the Olympic qualification, as the competition within our team is very fierce”.

Tamas Marcz (HUN) – Coach of the Best Male Water Polo Team 2018

“It’s a very special price, after a very special year for Hungary. We were second in the World League and we won the World Cup after 19 years. We wanted a lot this title. Looking ahead, we of course want a lot to be in the Olympic Games. At the last World Championships, at home in Budapest, we lost the final, but we are motivated to perform well in Gwangju, Korea. The field there will be very strong, but we are optimistic on a good result”.

Gary Hunt (GBR) – Best Male High Diver 2018

“This award means a lot for me. It was a very challenging year for me. Following my missed dive at the 2017 Worlds in Budapest, I had a difficult end of the year, a kind of mental block that obliged me to sit for over six months. I questioned myself a lot and I started 2018 in a very slowly way, performing a limited set of dives. Over the months, I recover my confidence back, and using my experience, I could manage to perform well at the World Cup in Abu Dhabi. I think the situation is now OK, and I face 2019 with a lot of optimism. On Hangzhou, I can feel that sport in part of city, and I really look forward to seeing what the future reserves to Hangzhou”.

Rhiannan Iffland (AUS) – Best Female High Diver 2018

“Winning this award for the second consecutive year is great! I’ve been in high diving for not so long, despite being involved with diving for the last 13 years of my life. For 2019, I am working with my coach and partner Todor Spasov on new dives, as we need to improve the degree of difficulty. For that, I will have many opportunities to compete throughout the year”.

Chad Le Clos (RSA) – Best Male Swimmer 2018

“I didn’t have any idea that the result for the male swimmer was so close (with Morozov). Regardless of that, I did my best in the 100m free. I thank FINA for this opportunity – it’s the second time I win this prize -, especially in a year where my participation at the Swimming World Cup was a bit shaky. I had to skip the third cluster, but four medals here mean a lot to me. The field here in Hangzhou was amazing – I was simply racing against the best in the world. I could say it was like ‘short course Olympics’. I had great races here, the 100 fly, where I improved the World Record but finished second, and the 100m free today, racing against Dressel and Morozov. It was really a great meet. Tokyo 2020 is of course my biggest focus and Hangzhou proved that from now on I can also sprint well. We had also in Hangzhou the end of career for Cameron (van der Burgh). He is a great example for all of us, and that’s why I wanted to dedicate this award also to him. From my side, I want to continue swimming into my thirties, but I have a lot of other projects – I have the ‘Chad Le Clos Foundation’, which is working with children with more need, from less developed areas of our country. My beginning was also very humble and I never forget that”.

Katinka Hosszu (HUN) – Best Female Swimmer 2018

“It’s the fourth time I receive the prize, so I am particularly happy. I am also thrilled with the way my year finished – on top. I was really glad with the results I could make here in Hangzhou, and I liked a lot the atmosphere here, with big crowds supporting all the athletes. In backstroke events, there was some challenges with the roof, but in the end everything went OK. I love to compete, I love to race, I am always ready to go! 2019 is an important year, as we are 12 months away from the Olympics. Preparation will be hard, but I am prepared for it”.
