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DWS, London, Day 2: Great Britain prevents a clean sweep for China

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The 14 nations competing in the FINA/CNSG Diving World Series [1] saw the second day of the London leg on Saturday

18 May play out with the usual tussle with China for the top spot on the podium. That is with the exception of the superior Jack Laugher of Great Britain of course, who dominated the men's 3m springboard event, finishing not far from the world record in his home country.

China's 13-year-old Chen Yuxi was the star of the show in the women's 10m platform, achieving four perfect 10s for her third dive, the armstand back 3 somersaults, before overtaking her 14-year-old teammate Zhang Minjie in the fourth round and holding on for gold in her final dive. Zhang could be forgiven for conceding her lead in the women's event by claiming gold in the mixed 10m synchro with Duan Yu shortly after.



No limits for Laugher and Goodfellow

Laugher looked strong from the beginning in the semi-finals, holding off any sniff of a threat from China's Wang Zongyuan throughout the six rounds, particularly when he posted a 99.45 score for the most difficult dive of the list, the 3.9 difficulty forward 2 ½ somersaults 3 twists in the fourth round. His compatriot Daniel Goodfellow joined him in qualifying for the final by staying consistent throughout the rounds, in a switch of fortunes behind Wang's teammate Peng Jianfeng.

As promised, no one could catch Laugher in the final as he put down a 562.65 score – not far shy of the 572.90 world record. Peng looked to be in the secondary medals for much of the final and continued to switch places with Goodfellow through the rounds, until he was pipped at the last by both Goodfellow with 500.55 points and compatriot Wang with 481.70, who took silver and bronze respectively. Peng only managed to finish with a 454.75 points score to leave him out of the medals.

Laugher said of his outstanding performance:

“I am over the moon with the first five dives. That is the highest score I have ever been on leading into my final dive. If I had just put a back 3 ½ in I would have got a world record. The world record was on my mind leading into the final dive but I played it safe and left something in the tank for the World Championships. I'll nail it there and hopefully that world record will be mine.

“It is really fantastic to get a one-two with Dan and for him to get over 500 points is a real world-class performance and for him to do it in front of a home crowd is unbelievable. If we can do that together (in the synchro event) there is no limit to what we can achieve. To finish the World Series with a huge score and a gold medal is amazing.”

Team GB will be salivating at the prospect of a Laugher-Goodfellow synchro partnership at the upcoming World Championships, which Goodfellow was sure to encourage:

“I think everyone knew when we put the partnership together at the start of the year what we are capable of in the future. It is just for me about getting more competitions under the belt. I’m still not near where I want to be in terms of consistency and how I feel on the board. If you had asked me before this if I would medal in the World Champs I don’t think I would have believed you but now I think it is a realistic target.”

China celebrates its golden teenagers

The morning’s semi-finals saw the highest ranking athlete going into the competition in the women’s 10m platform Kim Mi Rae from DPR Korea usurped by the gold medallist from the 10m synchro, Chen, in qualifying highest for the finals. Chen then went on to claim gold in the final with her 413.80 score, with her teammate Zhang Minjie taking silver from her 385.80 score to Kim’s bronze medal winning 360.90.

Chen, whose parents come from a gymnastics background and were able to spot her talents early on, said of her second gold in as many days at this competition:

“It just happened and I’m so excited to get the best outcome. I didn’t think too much about it as everyone was going for that gold medal. I was very nervous in the first two rounds as this (Diving World Series) is my first time competing in a foreign country.”

Despite her fatigue going into the mixed 10m synchro final with 13-year-old partner Yu, Zhang confidently strode through the rounds helping the pair post a final score of 356.28 to upgrade her medal collection to gold. They felt little pressure from DPR Korea’s Hyon Il Myong and Jo Jin Mi who took silver with 333.48 and Russia’s Nikita Shleikher and Iuliia Timoshinina, whose 316.05 score allowed them to snatch bronze from Canadian hopefuls Vincent Riendeau and Caeli McKay.

Zhang said of her gold and silver haul:

“I’m pretty satisfied with the gold medal but I could have done better than the silver medal (in the women’s 10m platform), my ability is better than that. I had a little bit of a problem coming into the mixed 10m synchro final as I was a bit tired but I just thought I would just see how it goes.”

While Team China have had a mixed run of results in this leg of the series, albeit a fruitful one, they remain focused which appears to be one of the secrets to their success as Zhang added:

“The atmosphere in the Chinese team is very fierce. When we compete in a foreign country we are teammates but when we compete in the same country we are very strong opponents.”
