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Day 4: USA impresses with 10 more medals; Pallister (AUS) shines in the 400m free

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In a fourth day highlighted by eight finals, the 7th FINA World Junior Swimming Championships continues in Budapest (HUN) under the dominance of the US team. This Friday, the North Americans collected 10 more medals (including four gold) and established one World Junior Record (and two Championships Records). Belarus (silver), Czech Republic and Ukraine (one gold each) made their entry in the medal chart, while Australia (with a new Championships best standard for Lani Pallister) and Russia completed the list with victories in the session. Japan young stars were also in good shape with three podium presences. The Magyar rendezvous has provided so far five new Junior World Records and 13 Championships Records.

The day started in the best possible way, with a thrilling final in the men's 200m breaststroke. Shoma Sato, from Japan, the fastest of the semis, departed like a bullet, touching 0.53 off the (elite) World Record at the 50m-mark, and seemed to control the race until the very last metres, when a dramatic attack from US Josh Matheny proved successful. The North American touched for gold in 2:09.40, a new Championships Record (and only 0.01 slower than the Junior WR), while Sato could not get the first title for his country in this competition, finishing second in 2:09.56. The bronze went to the second Japan's representative in the final, Yuta Arai (2:10.84). Matheny had already won silver in the 100m breast and was part of the golden team in the 4x100m medley mixed relay. For both Sato and Arai, this was their first medal in Budapest.

In the women's 50m butterfly, action took place well in the middle of the pool, with lanes 3, 4 and 5 quite close until the last touch. In the end, prevailed US Torri Huske (lane 3), in a winning time of 25.70. She was closely followed by the fastest of the semis, Anastasiya Shkur dai, from Belarus, silver medallist in 25.77 (first podium presence for this nation in the Magyar capital). Claire Curzan, from USA, closed the podium in 25.81. It was the third medal of the Championships for Huske, after the gold in the 4x100m medley mixed relay and the silver in the 100m free. Shkur dai had been fifth in the 100m back, in a race where Curzan was the runner-up.



Torri Huske (USA) - Photo by Istvan Derencsenyi

Another very undecided final consecrated Jan Cejka (CZE) as the new junior champion in the men's 50m back, touching home in 25.08. After narrowly missing the final of the 100m back – he was ninth in the semi -, Cejka gave his country the first medal in the competition. Wyatt Davis (USA, third in the 100m back), swimming in lane 4, upgraded to silver in 25.23, while Thomas Ceccon, from Italy, took bronze in 25.35. The Italian (18 years old) was one of the athletes to watch at the 2018 Youth Olympic Games, where he earned five medals. At the recent FINA World Championships in Gwangju (KOR), his best result was a 17th place in the 100m back.



Jan Cejka (CZE) - Photo by Istvan Derencsenyi

Italy seemed in a good position to do better in the women's 100m breaststroke, when Benedetta Pilato, swimming in lane 1, touched first at the 50m-mark, but she would lose stamina in the second half of the race, when Evgeniia Chikunova (RUS) applied a decisive attack and headed for gold in 1:06.93 (the third title for Russia in the Championships). She was closely followed by US Kaitlyn Dobler (bronze in the 50m breast), second this time in 1:06.97, while Kayla van der Merwe (GBR, silver in the shorter distance), downgraded to third in 1:07.06.



Photo by Istvan Derencsenyi

After winning the 800m free, Lani Pallister, from Australia, also didn't find special problems in controlling the women's 400m free final, touching for gold in 4:05.42, a new Championships Record, improving the best mark (4:06.17) of her compatriot Tamsin Cook from Singapore 2015. With the Australian perfectly controlling operations, the real fight was for the silver medal, with Emma O'Croinin (bronze in the 4x200m free relay) winning the battle against Rachel Stege. The Canadian secured silver in 4:08.11, with the US representative touching in third (4:08.30).



Lani Pallister (AUS) - Photo by Istvan Derencsenyi

In the men's 50m free, Vladyslav Bukhov also gave Ukraine its first gold (and medal) in the Magyar capital, touching for gold in 22.13, slightly better than the fastest of the heats, US David Curtiss (silver in 22.14). United States collected its eighth medal of the day with the bronze of Adam Chaney in 22.40. Bukhov had been seventh with his team in the 4x100m free relay and was born on July 5, 2002. While this was the first medal in Hungary for Curtiss, Chaney has now a total of three podium presences, after previous victories in the 4x100m free and 4x100m free mixed relay. Despite having two representatives in the final, the Singaporean delegation saw Jonathan Eu Jin Tan arriving in fifth, and Mikkel Lee finishing in eighth.



Vladyslav Bukhov (UKR) - Photo by Istvan Derencsenyi

The third US title of the day went to Justina Kozan in the women's 200m IM. The 15-year-old touched for gold in 2:11.55, slightly slower than the Championships Record of 2:11.03, dating back to 2015. It was the first individual title for the US junior ace, after the victory in the 4x200m free relay. The silver went to Alba Vazquez Ruiz, from Spain, the winner of the 400m IM on Day 1. The Iberian touched the wall in 2:13.43, and was followed by Mei Ishihara from Japan, third in 2:13.52.



Justina Kozan (USA) - Photo by Istvan Derencsenyi

The fourth day in Budapest concluded with the men's 4x200m free relay, and another (the fourth) victory for the US delegation. Formed by Jake Magahey, Luca Orlando, Jake Mitchell and Carson Foster, the North American quartet stopped the clock at 7:08.37, a new Junior World (and Championships) Record, improving the 7:10.95 standard established by Hungary in Indianapolis 2017. The silver went to Russia in 7:11.90, while Australia earned bronze in 7:15.06.



Team of USA - Photo by Istvan Derencsenyi

QUOTES

Josh Matheny (USA), gold, 200m breast

“I knew it was going to be quite a fight and had to go all-in as the Japanese were the favourites. Over the last 25m I saw we were close and I thought it was now or never and I just gave everything I had at the end. It went beyond everything I hoped for. I wished to have a good 2.10, or going under was the ultimate goal but to go 2:09.40 it just goes beyond imagination.”

Torri Huske (USA), gold, 50m fly

“It was really exciting, I like feeling the energy of the others, watching my team-mates in the ready room and they got me really excited before swimming this event. I would say everything went according to my plans. In the 50m you’ll never know what’s going to happen because everything can go wrong but now everything was just clicking, yeah.”

Jan Cejka (CZE), gold, 50m back

“Well, I’m totally surprised to win this event. In this event everything should go well to have a chance and it seems now everything worked in my way. This is the first ever gold medal at big FINA events for my country so I’m really proud.”

Kaitlyn Dobler (USA), silver, 100m breast

“Actually, it was really exciting, I was really happy to be able to go under 1:07 and it was really cool experience to stand on the podium at the end. It was just a little bit of ‘oh-my-Gosh-how-close-I-was’, I’m really happy to be here and represent my country.”

Lani Pallister (AUS), gold, 400m free

“I think the 400m is quite interesting to swim as it’s not quite a sprint but also not a distance enough to play a

strategy like in the 800m. I really wanted to attack the first 200m to set myself up to make a relatively good time. Although I'm not completely happy with the time but I'm happy how I swam tonight."

Vladyslav Bukhov (UKR), gold, 50m free

"I'm so happy and proud to win this gold medal. Everything came together, this was the best race of my life! You know, last year, in our national championships in Ukraine I lost this race by 0.01sec which was quite bad feeling. Now I got everything back, I think."

David Curtiss (USA), silver, 50m free

"I'm disappointed but I still had this silver medal. We also got a bronze, two medals for the US, it's definitely pushing us to the right direction. I think I did my job here. Taking a first place is definitely an honour but missing it by one-hundredth of a second you can believe is very disappointing. I didn't have so much energy as I had in the semi-final that why I had done so much better in the semis. Everything seemed to be alright along the lack of energy in the race which was not."

Justina Kozan (USA), gold, 200m IM

"I think it was a really good swim as I dropped a second and I'm really happy about that. My breaststroke leg was much better than this morning, and my freestyle coming home was great. Freestyle is one of my best strokes so I really love to do it right."
