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Day 6: USA and Russia dominate final session; Grgic “flies” in the 1500m free

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The sixth and last day of the 7th FINA World Junior Swimming Championships provided exciting finals at the “Duna Arena” in Budapest (HUN), with USA and Russia largely dominating the session, with respectively five and four titles (out of 11 races). The exceptions were the gold of Croatia’s Franko Grgic in the men’s 1500m free (accompanied by a World Junior and Championships record), and the win of New Zealand’s Erika Fairweather in the women’s 200m free. Otherwise, the other junior world standard improved this evening belonged to Russia in the men’s 4x100m medley relay.

Overall, USA largely dominated the medal chart, with a total of 37 podium presences, while the top-5 was completed by Russia (22), Australia (13), Italy and Canada (both with 12). Athletes from 20 countries were able to get a medal throughout the 42 races in the programme.

At the end of the Championships, the trophies for the best swimmers and team were given to Lani Pallister (AUS), among women, and to Andrei Minakov (RUS) in the men’s category. The delegation of USA was naturally the “Best Team of the Championships”.

In terms of performances, no less than eight new World Junior and 17 Championships Records were bettered during the six-day event.



Luca Urlando (USA) - Photo by Istvan Derencsenyi

For this last session, and in the men's event, the evening started with the 100m free, where Andrei Minakov earned his sixth medal of the Championships, the gold, in a time of 48.73. The Russian talent had been also first in the 100m butterfly, and collected a further four silver medals in the 50m fly and three relays. Besides this junior achievement, he is the current vice-champion at elite level, after his second place at the recent FINA World Championships in Gwangju.

Wyatt Davis (USA) left Indianapolis with a complete set of medals in the backstroke events, after winning the gold in the 200m, in 1:58.18. Before today's final (where he decisively accelerated in the last 20m to narrowly beat his teammate Carson Foster), he was second in the 50m and third in the 100m.

After his convincing victory in the 800m, Franko Grgic, from Croatia (16 years old), did it again in the 1500m free, and in what a style! Stopping the watch at 14:46.09, he largely improved the World Junior and Championships Record in the longest event of the swimming programme. The best planet's mark was owned by Mack Horton (AUS) since April 2014 in a time of 14:51.55, while the competition standard (14:56.60) had been set also by Horton in Dubai 2013.



Franko Grgic (CRO) - Photo by Istvan Derencsenyi

Luca Urlando gave USA another gold medal, with a thrilling victory in the 200m butterfly. In lane 6, Federico Burdisso, from Italy, departed very fast – he was under the World Junior Record at the 50m-mark -, but his stamina declined in the second half of the race, to eventually let him win the bronze. Urlando touched home in 1:55.02 – he had previously been the winner of the 200m free and part of three golden relays for the US.

Shortly after, it was time for Russia to shine thanks to Vladislav Gerasimenko in the 50m breast. Swimming in lane 4, the 18-year-old (also the best in the 100m) touched for gold in 27.58, leaving the minor medals to Gabe Mastromatteo (CAN), silver in 27.73, and to Archie Goodburn (GBR), third in 27.83. Josh Matheny, from USA, the fastest in the 200m and runner-up in the 100m, had this time to content with the fourth place, in 27.96.



Vladislav Gerasimenko (RUS) - Photo by Istvan Derencsenyi

Among women, the Russian duel in the 200m breast turned out in Evgeniia Chikunova's favour, who touched home in 2:24.03 for the gold – at only 14, she was also the winner in the 100m. Anastasia Makarova arrived slightly behind, in a time of 2:24.39.



Erika Fairweather (NZL) - Photo by Istvan Derencsenyi

In the 100m butterfly, it was time for USA to have two additional medallists: in the lead, Torri Huske touched for gold in 57.71, while the bronze went to Claire Curzan in 58.37. In the “middle”, Anastasiya Shkur dai (BLR) swam for silver in 57.98. Before this final, Huske had visited the podium on four occasions: gold in the 50m fly, two relays, and the silver in the 100m free. The US athlete will complete 17 years old next December 7.

In another US duel, Gretchen Walsh added another success to her collection, by becoming the junior world champion in the 50m free, in a time of 24.71 – she narrowly defeated the second North American representative in the final, Maxine Parker (silver in 24.75). Born on January 29, 2003 Walsh had been also first in the 50m free and in three relays: the 4x100m free, 4x100m free mixed and 4x100m medley mixed.

The 200m free race was a bit too fast for Lani Pallister (AUS), winner of the 400m, 800m and 1500m free. The Australian fought until the very last metres, but the victory went to Erika Fairweather, from New Zealand, in a time of 1:57.97. Pallister had to content with silver in 1:58.09. Besides her individual successes, the Australian talent was also silver medallist in the 4x100m free and 4x200m free events.



Evgeniia Chikunova (RUS) - Photo by Istvan Derencsenyi

In relay action, USA had a perfect record of six wins out of six races contested until this last session. In the men’s 4x100m medley, this supremacy was broken by Russia, who took gold in 3:33.19, a new Junior World and Championships Record. Swimming with Nikolay Zuev (back), Vladislav Gerasimenko (breast), Andrei Minakov (fly) and Aleksandr Shchegolev (free), the Russians broke their own world standard, set at the 2018 Youth Olympic Games, when they clocked 3:35.17. The North Americans earned silver in 3:33.66.

In the women’s 4x100m medley, USA and Russia had the opportunity to untie the number of gold medals – four – on this final day. This time, the North Americans did better, getting the last title on offer in 3:59.13. The composition of the winning team included Claire Curzan (back), Kaitlyn Dobler (breast), Torri Huske (fly) and Gretchen Walsh (free). Russia was the silver medallist in 4:00.30.



Gretchen Walsh (USA) - Photo by Istvan Derencsenyi

Quotes

Andrei Minakov (RUS), gold, 100m free

“Man, that was tough. I went out too fast. Usually I begin with 24-something, now it was 23.33 and that killed me for the last 25 metres. I mean, in practice I did it sometimes it worked so I thought I was trying it but perhaps it’s not the same when you do it in training or you do it on Day 6 at the World Championships. But anyway, the time is fine and it was my last individual swim of the season so it was great.”

(on the relay win with WJR) “I think each of us did his best. The four fastest guys of each discipline were put together so we agreed to better our World Junior Record. We achieved that so this is a very good ending to these championships.”

Joshua Liendo Edwards (CAN), silver, 100m free

“It was really good, I was happy, I got out fast – usually I’m just a bit behind and try to come back so I just focused on trying to get out fast and bring it home. It’s my best time, it’s good, 48 would have been great but 49.17 is just as good.”

Wyatt Davis (USA), gold, 200m back

“My race was exactly how I wanted it to go. I knew my team-mate Carson Foster would swim next to me and would push me all the way and definitely helped me to finish the race the way I did. I am very happy with that time, it’s a best time by 0.7 seconds.”

Torri Huske (USA), gold, 100m fly

“It was pretty good. It also feels really great that I can swim for team USA and represent my country this way. I haven’t looked at my race yet but there are always things you can do better.”

Franko Grgic (CRO), gold, WJR, 1500m free

“Oh, that was hard, after 400m I felt I was losing pace and it took a while until I reached the necessary speed again. Well, I kind of expected this time, I think, I’m capable of swimming around 14.40 but I had some problems with my shoulders during the summer. I could train normally in the last five weeks but I had three weeks off before that, so

this is the reason why I couldn't come faster.”

Gretchen Walsh (USA), gold, 50m free

“It was much better than the heats and the semis, I dropped a tenth after the semis, that's all I can really asked for. Even when I was racing I just saw my fellow US team-mate swimming next to me and I was like, let's get a US 1-2 and we did that, checked. It was a good race, though my start was definitely too deep but then I held my breath the whole way, which I wanted to do. It was really hard on the legs in the last metres and I just wanted to have a good finish, have my hands on the wall.”

Luca Urlando (USA), gold, 200m fly

“It's obviously not the time I wanted, but I got the job done and I couldn't be happier. This has been by far the longest season I ever had but the best too. I'm leaving on a high note. I knew going into the race how I had to perform, what I usually do, otherwise I would die on the last 50m. So I tried to build it and then race the last 25m. Even if Federico went far ahead I just tried to relax and follow my own plan.”

Federico Burdisso (ITA), bronze, 200m fly

“I'm disappointed. I always race like this so there was nothing new in this, my last 50m was bad, I lacked the necessary power. In Gwangju I was fourth in the final and was one second faster. With that time I would have won here. So it's disappointing, definitely.”

Vladislav Gerasimenko (RUS), gold, 50m breast

“It was a very good swim. I just wanted to focus on my lane, on my swim and I just did that. The time is good, now I’m really happy.”

Erika Fairweather (NZL), gold, 200m free

“It was definitely a swim of a lifetime. It was a great race, super fast, it was awesome to race against these girls. I’m definitely happy with my time, this is how fast I wanted to go.”

Lani Pallister (AUS), silver, 200m free

“I’m a little bit disappointed as I made a couple of mistakes. But there is nothing I want to take away from Erika, she is so young, she has an amazing future and I’m so happy for her. I have a lot to work on and this result also gives me a lot determination for next year.

It was the same as last year at the junior Pan Pacs when I got second in the 200m. I was hoping to come a little bit faster but can’t be mad. I think, compared to my distance events, I don’t go out anywhere as fast as in the other events. I have a lot more in me, I will use the 200m free to improve to go out faster, and my turns need a lot of improvement, which is something I’m working on.”
