

European Aquatics Championships, Rome (ITA), Day 11 – Summary

Finally, Sereda claims diving gold to Ukraine, Acerenza and Beck rule the sea

After five silver medals, Ukraine's diving team clinched a gold in the very last event of the European Aquatics Championships, thanks to Oleksii Sereda's outstanding performance in the men's platform. Great Britain also got a gold to finish atop in the diving medal table with six titles. Down at the sea, Italian open water swimmers thrilled the crowd again, Domenico Acerenza bagged two golds, one in the 10km and another one later with the relay. This was title No. 24 for the host nation which finished the championships with 67 medals overall, 40 more than second ranked Great Britain – a scene never seen before in the history of the Europeans.

Diving

It's a gold, finally. Ukrainian divers performed really well, but clinched silver medals in succession – never trailed by more than five points to the eventual winners –, but on the closing day, in the very last event Oleksii Sereda gave it all and finished atop with a magnificent performance. Yet to turn 17, Sereda was at his best once more. Adjusting brilliantly to his body transformation, the youngest-ever European champion (won in 2019, aged 13) was on fire. After a relatively modest opening round he got going, two fine dives were followed by three truly outstanding ones, two were close to 90 points, the last one scoring 91.20 after judges pushed the perfect 10 on their scoring devices for the first time in the diving meet.

Sereda won by 35 points – after the Ukrainians bowed to the Brits four times, now he kept two GB divers at bay. Though they proved that Britain should not worry about the post-Daley area in platform diving: after winning the synchro event, both Brits stood on the podium here too. Noah Williams got the silver, had one weaker dive but two 80+ pointers, while Ben Cutmore produced six dives worth 70+ points each.

And earlier they already secured their top spot in the medal ranks by securing their sixth gold medal in the men's 3m synchro. It was bounce-back time for Jack Laughner who, after coming first in the 1m, faltered badly in the 3m final. However, the 2016 synchro Olympic champion came back strong with his new pair Anthony Harding, and despite a minor setback in the third round, they offered a series of brilliant dives to outperform the hosts. Lorenzo Marsaglia and Giovanni Tocci enjoyed some great afternoons in the Foro Italico, finished 2-3 in the 1m, 1-3 in the 3m but now the Brits were way more consistent.

Harding and Laughner had three 80+ pointers, the Italians only one, their last two were visibly weaker, so they could barely escape from sliding back to the third place, but prevailed by 3.08 points ahead of the Ukrainians.

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The Brits topped the medal ranks with 6 titles and 12 medals overall, Italy also had 12 podium finishes – and the GB team sailed away with the Team Trophy as well, bagging five more points than the Italians.

Open water

Domenico Acerenza finally made it. Stepping, or rather swimming out of the shadow of the great Gregorio Paltrinieri, the Italian finally reached the top and he did that in front of an enthusiastic home crowd. After finishing runner-up at the Worlds in June in Budapest and here in the 5km, both time behind team-mate King Gregorio, this time he made the most out of this extraordinary race.

Held in a bit calmer but still wavy waters, the men's competition was rocked Hungary's two-time junior European champion David Betlehem who stormed to the lead right at the beginning, and by the fourth round he was ahead by a mile, at one stage by 42 seconds. However, swimming alone, he couldn't find the straight lines between the buoys – he said after he probably swam 12km overall – and by the end of the fifth, the chasers caught up him. It turned out he ran out of gas, so the medals were decided by the same group of swimmers as a day earlier, though this time the title-holder, Paltrinieri was missing from the mix. Acerenza still kept the gold at home, while the two French battled for the silver, Marc-Antoine Olivier pipped Logan Fontaine once more (in the 5km he out-touched him for the bronze).

The women's race remained in the normal framework, the lead was changed constantly, and the ladies decided the outcome over the last kilometre – as usual. Germany's Leonie Beck reached the best gear in the decisive phase, halting Sharon van Rouwendaal's three-edition winning streak and earning a first gold at a major championship. The Dutchwoman looked to be very much set for another 5-10km double here (she achieved that in 2018 and 2021), but at the end she was even denied of taking a medal here. Angelica Andre hit the panel 0.2sec ahead of her to claim a historical first-ever open water medal for Portugal at the Europeans. Ginevra Taddeucci did a personal premiere by making the podium at a major for the first time in her career – and she also ensured that Italy got a medal in each event here in Ostia.

As it was inevitable that the hosts would finish the meet on the podium after the team re-ly – having the 5km and 10km champions (Paltrinieri, Acerenza) and the women's 10km runner-up (Ginevra Taddeucci) in their line-up made the absolute favourite. The only question was whether the event happened at all as the waves hit the same heights as a day earlier when the 25km event had to be stopped. However, with just five teams staying on board (and each reinforced its intention to race), and only 1250m per swimmers to be covered, the officials gave the green light – which prompted the athletes to cheer loudly in the prep area.

In return, they produced another fantastic race despite the vast majority had swum the 10km some hours earlier. Though Spain took the lead over the first leg thanks to 5km runner-up Maria de Valdes' inspired swim, in the second Taddeucci took over the lead and charged ahead with 10km champion Leonie Beck of Germany and France's world champion Aurelie Muller at her feet. However, David Betlehem, fuelled by his anger from the 10km race, stormed to the second place in minutes (though the Hungarians were trailing by 20m at the first changeover) to stage a great duel with Paltrinieri.

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Turning to the last leg, it was an Italy v Hungary duel for the title and in the middle of the anchor leg Olympic silver medallist Kristof Rasovszky even overtook Acerenza and led for a while. The freshly crowned 10km champion staged one big finish, though, retook the lead and secured a third gold to Italy in Ostia. Hungary came second, one better than last year in Budapest. The French also crowned their fine performance here, grabbed their fourth medal – so three happy quartets posed with Gastone, the giant black living mascot (and rescue dog on his busier days) for the medal photos, followed by a memorable celebration of the Italian team which claimed the Team Trophy. The athletes then walked down to the shore to sing and dance with the ensembled crowd in the sand – a fitting end to the Ostia spectacle.

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