

European Aquatics Championships, Rome (ITA), Day 5 – Summary

Sjostrom ties Popov's all-time medal tally, Popovici cracks another junior WR

A bronze for Sarah Sjostrom in the mixed medley relay became a milestone in the European Championships' history as the Swede tied the legendary Alexander Popov's tally of 26 medals, an all-time best. David Popovici went on bettering records, this time set a new junior global mark while winning the 200m free, and the Romanian now is the third man ever to get inside 1:43min. Simona Quadarella got one step closer to complete the unprecedented triple-triple: she cruised to another fine win in the 1500m, and since she had won the 800m, now she needs to add the 400m to win all three distances at the third straight edition. Golds for Switzerland and Greece added special flavour to the fifth day of the championships, which also saw the start of the diving meet where Italy got the first gold and the conclusion of the artistic swimming competition where three Ukrainians, Marta Fiedina and the Aleksii twins finished with six golds apiece.

Swimming

David Popovici didn't lay back and slow down at all after making the headlines with his magical 100m free world record. His other, if not preferred event, the 200m free came next where another towering global mark awaits him. Set in 2009, by the magnificent German Paul Biedermann on the top of his career, wearing a shiny suit – the 1:42.00 perhaps poses a lot bigger challenge than Cielo's 46.91 did in the 100m.

Popovici likes to underline that he prefers the step-by-step approach – and he is not just talking about that but put it in practice once more. After clocking 1:43.21 at the Worlds to improve his junior WR, now he had another blast by entering waters uncharted since 2009. He touched the wall inside 1:43min, indeed, the first man ever in textile. Only two greats achieved that in the past, both in shiny suits: Biedermann, and before him the one and only Michael Phelps, at the Beijing Olympics, when he won with 1:42.96. No one ever since. Now Popovici is 0.01sec away from Phelps' effort – next steps are to follow in due time.

Simona Quadarella dipped inside 16min while winning the 1500m free – she did it with ease, ahead of 400m IM champion Viktoria Mihalyvari Farkas of Hungary and compatriot Rita Caramignoli. Quadarella's golden count now stands at 8 European titles, and she needs to add the 400m crown on the last day to achieve the triple-triple: to win the 400-800-1500m at three consecutive editions.

While the outcome of these finals was pretty much in the cards, there was a couple of stunning wins in other events. Lisa Mamie's victory in the women's 200m breast came as a surprise, ahead of Italy's top qualifier Martina Carraro. Mamie was runner-up a year ago, still, this was something special, Swiss gold in women breaststroke – never happened before.

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Apostolos Christou of Greece medalled in the 100m back in 2021 but never won a major event – up until now when he out-touched Italy’s poster boy Thomas Ceccon by 0.04sec in the 50m back. He is now in the footsteps of Aristidis Grigoriadis who won the dash back in 2008.

Sweden also enjoyed a fine day – Louise Hansson claimed a couple of 4th and 5th places in the 100m fly earlier but never got to the podium. Then this evening she stormed to a brilliant win, staging a fiery finish to pass title-holder Marie Wattel practically over the last two metres to win it by 0.14sec; Bosnia’s hero from the 2021 Rome juniors Lana Pudar came third.

Then, at the end of the session Hansson was back together with team-mates to finish third in the mixed free relay – France won it with a balanced performance, including a consoling anchor leg for Wattel who was upset a bit after finishing runner-up in the fly event; the Brits took the silver.

The bronze for Sweden meant that Sarah Sjostrom got even with Alexander Popov on the all-time individual medal ranks. The legendary Russian sprinter amassed 26 medals during his amazing career, between 1991 and 2004, took 21 golds, 3 silvers and 2 bronzes (13 of those came in relays, had 10 individual golds). Though Sjostrom has less gold – so far –, 15 (with 7 silvers and 4 bronzes), however, all but one of her wins came in individual races. And one can bet that soon she becomes the sole leader of the historical chart as she qualified for the 50m free in the first place and is very much set to win the event on Tuesday, just like she did at the Worlds back in June.

Divining

The diving competition kicked off with the usual team event early afternoon and Italy bagged the first gold right away, bettering Ukraine with a tiny margin of 3.50 points. The marks were almost identical across all six rounds, the Ukrainians even collected more 8.0s for a couple of attempts, still, the higher DDs saved the day for the home team. Great Britain finished third.

Artistic Swimming

After bagging eight medals last year in Budapest, four golds and four silvers, Ukraine’s Marta Fiedina finished her campaign with two less medals but now all six of them are gold (this time she did not compete in the duet). On the closing day of the artistic swimming competition, she was part of Ukraine’s winning team in the free final (despite a rare point penalty, for a time violation during the initial pool-deck movement), to crown her quest here in Rome – Italy and France got the minor spoils.

The duets, both the women and the mixed pairs, competed in the technical finals and the ranks didn’t change on the top. The twins ruled the women’s show, Ukraine’s Aleksiiwas won convincingly, earning a couple of 9.6s for artistic impression. They also bring home six gold medals apiece. The Alexandris from Austria finished second, ahead of Linda Cerruti and Constanza Ferro of Italy.

Giorgio Minisini, with Lucrezia Ruggeiro, completed his mission of clinching four gold medals at home – their winning margin was huge once again, more than five points, ahead of Spain’s Pau Ribes and Emma Garcia. And the Solymosy siblings from Slovakia will bring another bronze to the family home – though Jozef, aged 17, added that his happiness will end soon as he needs to return to school.

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Ukraine topped the medal chart with 8 gold medals (out of 8 events), while Italy grabbed 12 (4-6-2) as the hosts also had a strong presence in the male and mixed events and that also landed them the Team Trophy. In terms of individual totals, Linda Cerruti amassed the largest tally with 8 medals, six silvers and two bronzes.

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