

## European Aquatics Championships, Rome (ITA), Day 3 – Summary

### Popovici: in a world of his own

**It's official: David Popovici is the fastest swimmer on Earth – the Romanian set a new world record in the 100m free in Rome, bringing down Cesar Cielo's 13-year-old mark to clock 46.86. Sweden's Sarah Sjöström got two medals, a gold and a silver, to catch up with Katinka Hosszu on the all-time medal charts (they stand with 25 apiece). Italy enjoyed more success and Great Britain landed its first title in Rome.**

Finally, it happened – and it had to happen here, in the Foro Italico, where Brazil's Cesar Cielo set that monstrous 46.91 world record in 2009 when the full-body supersuits propelled the top swimmers to better 43 global marks at the World Championships.

Though many thought that those records should remain untouchable for long years, if not decades, the most talented athletes of the following generations started bringing them down, one after the other. Still, the men's freestyle WRs really seemed to be out of reach – up until now. When David Popovici surfaced last year here in Rome at the junior Europeans and set a series of incredible junior WRs, the expert eye saw immediately that he could be the chosen one.

Today he proved that: after clocking 47.13 at the World Championships, then breaking the 47sec barrier here in the semis, bringing down Cielo's mark should come next. The only minor concern was that the Romanian Rocket slowed down a bit in Budapest for the final, he was almost 0.4sec slower than in the semis (just as the field, still won the title). But here everything unfolded as expected – and he got a boost from the next lane where Kristof Milak checked in for a test to try speeding in the freestyle after rewriting the history books in butterfly.

Though Popovici turned second at the halfway mark, his homecoming leg was truly amazing and when he touched the wall, the Stadio del Nuoto erupted, the crowd created such if not bigger noise when the Italians were doing something great. Popovici shaved off 0.05sec from the previous mark to become the fastest swimmer in the world. Milak came second with 47.47 – and applauded his rival at the wall –, while Italy's Alessandro Miressi finished third. (As a matter of interest: this year marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Johnny Weissmuller's first-ever sub-1min swim in this event – this was the Popovici Way to honour that milestone.)

The other finals also offered thrilling races. Sarah Sjöström managed to get even with Katinka Hosszu in the all-time medal chart as she bagged two medals this evening. First, she retook the 50m fly title with another fine sub-25sec effort to win the event for the 5<sup>th</sup> time since 2012 (her injury last year prevented her from making six straight victories). Then she came second with the Swedish free relay to claim her 25<sup>th</sup> podium in the history of the championships. Hosszu was supposed to add a 26<sup>th</sup> to her tally but she bowed out in the 400m IM heats in the morning – despite finishing 4<sup>th</sup>, two of her

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compatriots posted better times and one nation could have only two qualifiers. (The five-time champion missed the 400m IM final for the first time since 2006, apart from 2018 when she did not enter.)

Though the other two, Viktoria Mihalyvari-Farkas and Zsuzsanna Jakabos did a splendid job. The younger left no doubt that she was ready to take over the reign – she was runner-up last year –, while Jakabos, competing in her record-setting 10<sup>th</sup> Europeans, staged a great finish to clinch the silver and return to the podium after 2016.

Italy also staged a 1-2 finish, in the 100m breast, where world champion Benedetta Pilato added the European crown and Lisa Angiolini a bit surprisingly out-touched Ruta Meilutyte of Lithuania by 0.16sec. The atmosphere was also electrifying when Gregorio Paltrinieri smashed the Championship Record while winning the 800m free and compatriot Lorenzo Galossi claimed the bronze – the junior European champion also set a new junior WR; Germany's Lucas Maertens finished runner-up.

France enjoyed a fine start of the session as Yohann Ndoye Brouard won the 200m back convincingly right away, ahead of surprise silver medallist Benedek Kovacs of Hungary and Britain's Luke Greenbank. Soon came Marie Wattel's silver in the 50m fly (behind Sjostrom), while the Netherlands' Maïke de Waard got the bronze.

The Dutch medalled in another relay too – after winning the women's 4x200m free and the mixed 4x100m medley, now came third in the women's 4x100m free. Here Great Britain finally snatched gold – after collecting six medals already –, their two 53.4 splits secured a convincing title-defence.

### *Artistic Swimming*

No shake-up on the duet free day – Gregorio Minisini and Lucrezia Ruggiero gave their best to win the mixed title, Spain's experienced pair of Pau Ribes and Emma Garcia got the silver. And to create more history, the young Solymosi-siblings, Jozef and Silvia delivered a first-ever medal to Slovakia.

Siblings, rather twins, ruled the classical duet event as well. Ukraine's Aleksiiivas, Maryna and Vladyslava clinched the country's fourth gold here, while the Alexandri triplets of Austria had an even better day than on Friday. Then Vasiliki claimed the long-awaited medal in solo, today Eirini and Anna Maria bettered even the Italian duet of Linda Cerruti and Constanza Ferro for the silver.

12 August 2022

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