

European Aquatics Championships, Rome (ITA) – Opening Press Conference Highlights

Star athletes are gearing up to shine in the sunshine

In Rome all's set for the kick-off of the European Aquatics Championships in the Foro Italico, the legendary pool complex, site of the 1983 edition and the 1994 and 2009 FINA World Championships. In total 951 athletes from 50 countries will be competing for 231 medals in 77 competitions across the aquatic disciplines of swimming, open water, artistic swimming, diving, and high diving. For the first time since 2010, pool events will be staged outdoors.

This edition will offer some novelties – in artistic swimming, Rome will see the first-ever senior European men's solo event, and High Diving also appears for the first time at a LEN event with a temporary tower and pool built to welcome Europe's best.

As LEN President Antonio di Silva said at the opening press conference, *“Great efforts have been made to ensure that the permanent and temporary facilities in Rome and Ostia (for open water) will give athletes the best possible environment to perform and ensure that fans, and millions of TV viewers around Europe, will be able to enjoy top class competition.”*

The President was grateful for the organisers as he added: *“I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the Italian Swimming Federation, as well as to the authorities of the city of Rome and the Italian State, for their commitment to hosting this event, despite the challenges caused by the Covid epidemic.*

“Events like Roma 2022 also give us hope and optimism about the future. This event is the most important in our calendar and we can all look forward to spectacular competition over the next 11 days.”

President of the organising committee, Andrea Pieri also shared a couple of details on the preparations while LEN Operation Manager Marco Birri offered talked about the encouraging numbers mirroring a huge media interest. More than 400 accreditations have been issued and 37 right-holding broadcasters will offer live coverage of the event which also fits to the overall schedule of the multisport Europeans running parallel in Munich these days.

While the dangers of Covid-19 exposure are definitely lower at the outdoor venues, LEN and the LOC still keep some protocols in place, which require all athletes and officials to undergo testing upon arrival and so far five positive cases have been detected.

At the same time, athletes gear up for another outstanding edition of LEN's top showcase, and those invited to the press conference were keen to share their thoughts on the upcoming championships.

Here it is what they had to say.

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Katinka Hosszu, Hungary, Olympic, world and European champion swimmer

On her target of claiming 100 medals at major championships (her count stands at 96)

“I think it would be something special to get 100 medals since nobody has achieved that yet so that would be exciting. I may have a chance here as I’ll swim relays but even if I reach my goal that wouldn’t mean that I’m done with swimming.”

On still swimming the toughest events, the IMs and the 200m fly at the age of 33

“If I could swim 50m events, I would swim the 50! Much easier to have one length as Sarah (Sjostrom) does here. However, the way I was born... the events suiting me the best are still the medley and 200 fly so I keep on doing them, however hard they are.”

Sarah Sjostrom, Sweden, Olympic, world and European champion swimmer

On returning to Rome where she claimed her first world title at the age of 15 in 2009

“I love to swim in Rome, obviously this is one of my favourite pools. When I came to Rome in 2009, I surprised everyone... I think it won’t be such a surprise if I won this time.”

On dropping the 100m events for these European Championships

“Now it’s a light programme for me, I swim only the 50m and a couple of relays. I got Covid straight after Worlds, that is one reason, the other is that I’m not used to having two major competitions in one season. So this is just a temporary, I’d like to do the 100m free in the future, but not now.”

On her new hairstyle, coloured purplish

“I like to surprise people when I take my swimming cap off. Many Swedish girls have blonde hair, so I like to surprise people and chose this colour for this event.”

Federico Burdisso, Italy, Olympic medallist and world champion swimmer

On Italy’s fantastic run at the World Championships in June and the high expectations here

“We don’t feel any pressure while competing at home. We are in upbeat mood, we have a fantastic team, a real team, we know each other, each of us, we are young, hungry for success, it’s going to be great to race in front of our fans.”

On how challenging to swim fly events, next to world champion Kristof Milak (HUN)

“There is no challenge here, Kristof is simply out of reach. I only hope that I can reduce the gap a bit next year. I’m still looking forward to the races, wish to get medals and repeat our win in the medley relay.”

On swimming outdoors at a major championship

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“I love swimming outdoors, especially here. I think it’s not a challenge for either of us, I just hope we’ll have a nice weather. Since we haven’t seen much rain for two months, I guess we won’t have storms in the next days.”

Marta Fiedina, Ukraine, Olympic medallist, world and European champion artistic swimmer

On having outstanding success in recent years but needing to deal with the war hitting her home country

“Yes, we got great results, and I was really happy to achieve all those successes. Of course, what happens in Ukraine it all affects us, but we just got more motivation to represent our beautiful country, to show we are strong people with strong spirit.”

On their preparations during recent months

“We have been training here in Italy since March. The Italian Federation gave us everything we needed, we had perfect training conditions, nice apartments, even the underwater music works which is important for us. We cannot be grateful enough for that. As I know, other Ukrainian athletes also have fine trainings, swimmers are in Germany and Italy, divers are in Croatia so we can get ready for the championships.”

Chiara Pellacani, Italy, Olympic medallist, European champion diver

On having a top competition held outdoors

“For us this is really special, for sure, it’s more challenging than for the swimmers. We tried to adjust ourselves, we trained in Napoli as this facility was closed because of the construction works. But we are excited to compete here in Rome.”

On her goals after having some outstanding results in the past two years

“I really want to continue collecting medals, and improve my results compared to last year in Budapest. Again, I expect big things in the synchro events, but I also work on my individual dives, and I may do better this time.”

10 August 2022

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