

European Aquatics Championships, Rome (ITA), Day 10 – Summary

Paltrinieri, Rouwendaal: business as usual – more Popovici magic

The penultimate day of the European Aquatics Championships was packed with action across three disciplines. Open water swimming races finally got under way but only the 5km events were finished as planned. There, the reigning champions, Italy's Gregorio Paltrinieri and Netherlands' Sharon van Rouwendaal both retained their respective titles – but the 25km events had to be halted due to the worsening weather conditions. The diving events saw the same outcome as on the previous days in the other gender's event: the women's 10m synchro title went to the Brits (just like the men), while the Italy clinched a 1-3 finish in the men's 3m event with Lorenzo Marsaglia coming out on top. And after David Popovici's big time in the swimming pool, Constantin Popovici also rocked the Foro Italico by performing two out-of-this-world dives to win the inaugural men's high diving event.

Diving

For two rounds, the men's 3m final went as one might have expected it: the most decorated diver of the field Jack Laugher led with two brilliant dives. Things started changing midway through the event when the Brit came up with a mediocre attempt while his rivals – especially the Italians who had finished second and third behind in the 1m final – produced a couple of fine dives. Soon the race turned into a 'who-misses-less' competition and in this regard, Lorenzo Marsaglia really stood out. The runner-up of the 1m event received marks 7.0 or higher from the judges in the first five rounds – while the others were unable to keep a certain level.

Laugher bounced back in the fourth, only to fail his attempts in the fifth and then in the sixth to finish 5th. Giovanni Tocci, third in the 1m, missed his fourth, then performed the highest scoring one in the fifth (got 36.00, followed by 91.20) but finished his campaign with another erroneous jump. However, he still got the bronze, though trailed by 61 points to Marsaglia whose last dive wasn't clean either but still above the average. Though Laugher hit a low, Britain still claimed a silver, thanks to Jordan Houlden, who was not shining but did not do bigger mistakes.

Despite only four pairs entered the women's 10m synchro, the competition offered a high-level contest. The final ranks mirrored the results of the individual event: the medallists of that competition finished in the same order. Andrea Spendolini-Sirieix, with Lois Toulson, claimed another title after taking over the lead in the third round and never looking back. Ukraine's Sofia Lyskun, with Kseniia Bailo, challenged the Brits hard, but they had to settle for the silver again, by 4.74 points. The Ukrainians may feel unlucky here in Rome as they finished runner-up for the fifth time and the gap between them and the actual winner (four time from GB) was never bigger than 5 points... The bronze went to the Wassen siblings from Germany.

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High diving

The name Popovici has entered the history books twice in the Foro Italico this August. First by David Popovici who set a fantastic 46.86sec world record in the 100m free in the swimming meet – and now by Constantin Popovici who claimed the first-ever men’s high diving European title.

Just like the first two rounds, the third and the fourth were also thrilling. Leader Catalin Preda of Romania carried on his momentum from the previous days to perform a fantastic dive, bagging three perfect marks while France’s Gary Hunt got two 10s and Popovici and home hero Alessandro de Rose were also close to perfection, so it was all open before the final round.

Popovici had a stratospheric 6.0DD final dive which he delivered well to get 8.0s and 8.5s and bagged an evening-high 147 points, which ultimately landed him the title. Preda’s dive was not as clean, so he ended up in the second place while Hunt made a rare miss, and that sent De Rosa to the podium since the Italian had the best dive in the last round.

Open water

Gregorio Paltrinieri and Domenico Acerenza picked up everything where they had finished in June at the World Championships in Budapest when they had come 1-2 in the 10km race. The Italian pair ruled the field in the 5km which finally got under way after two days of enforced waiting because of the high winds and waves.

They had a fine contest with the French, but in the finish they left their rivals behind and it was Paltrinieri again who touched in first. The French duel for the bronze came down to a photo finish which favoured Marc-Antoine Olivier over Logan Fontaine. Post-race, Paltrinieri said that training in Ostia for years which also included practices in the sea was definitely a help on a day when the water was still wavy – Acerenza and apparently Olivier, who had been training with the Italians in recent months, also benefitted from the locally gained experience.

In the women’s event Sharon van Rouwendaal didn’t need any special knowledge on the course – the Dutch was superior once more and won the title for the third time in a row (Germany’s Peggy Busche achieved the triple in 1997-99-2000). Maria de Valdez came second to give Spain its best-ever finish in this event (after two bronzes in the past). The hosts also landed a medal in this event to, courtesy of Giulia Gabbrielleschi, who had been runner-up last May in Budapest and third this June at the Worlds.

In the afternoon the 25km was in the programme and the swimmers started off as scheduled. As the races went on, the wind got stronger and stronger, and the waves started getting similar in height as had been on the previous days when the athletes were not allowed to swim in the sea. However, three hours passed, and all 23 participants were out on the course, battling with the waves while making heroic efforts to hold on. But things did not look good at all and soon the first two decided to give it up. In minutes, the referees made the painful decision to stop the competition. Later the following statement was issued by LEN:

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“Due to a case of emergency because of the worsening weather conditions, both chief referees and the safety delegate decided to stop the races immediately for the safety of the Athletes and Officials on the course.

Since the Chief Referees did not have a view of the final rankings for both races, the LEN Technical Open Water Committee decided to cancel the classification for both races.

LEN owes an apology to all athletes participating this race, who devoted themselves to hard work to be ready for this event, for not being in a position to determine the final classification, even though the event was held amid these extreme conditions. According to LEN’s principles, the athletes’ and officials’ safety shall prevail in all circumstances.

The 10km races on Sunday and the 5km Team Relay are planned to be held according to the schedule announced earlier, from 10.00 and 16.00 respectively. However, in case of adverse weather conditions, the races can be postponed or cancelled.”

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