European Aquatics Championships, Rome (ITA), Day 7 – Summary

Medal feast for the hosts, Steenbergen with 7, Popovici and Meilutyte are the best

Host Italy bettered all historical records by finishing the swimming meet with 13 titles and 35 medals in total – both the highest numbers ever at the Europeans and consequently they also claimed the Team Trophy. Netherlands' Marrit Steenbergen stood on the podium once more to have 7 medals, the most by an individual here – among the men Italy's Thomas Ceccon became the most successful with six. The Swimmer of the Meet awards went to Romania's David Popovici and Lithuania's Ruta Meilutyte. In the diving pool Great Britain and Germany enjoyed a fine and sunny afternoon with some golden shining – both events were decided by a tiny margin of 3 points.

The final evening of the swimming competitions was kicked off by two thrilling dash events, where both Italian favourites were out-touched at the wall. Ben Proud retook his crown he had earned in 2018 (but relinquished in 2021 when he finished runner-up) by a 0.02sec margin ahead of Leonardo Deplano, so the Brit entered the club of the summer kings who had won the same event both at the World Champs in June and here.

Minutes later Ruta Meilutyte joined him as she beat world-record holder Benedetta Pilato once again after Budapest – there the difference was 0.10sec, here 0.12, and the Lithuanian was faster (29.59 – though not as fast in the semis, 29.44, which ultimately earned her the individual award).

The fans got a bit silent on both touches – then applauded the champions and the Italian runners-up –, but soon came Thomas Ceccon and gave the capacity crowd they wanted to see. It was a bit more exciting perhaps than one might have expected after Ceccon had set a stunning a new world record in June in Budapest, but he still pipped Greece's dash-winner Apostolos Christou for the title by 0.03sec (this was Greece's second medal in ten minutes after Kristian Gkolomeev came third in the 50m free). Champion of the 200m, Yohann Ndoye Brouard of France landed the bronze.

A hero from last year's junior Europeans here in Rome, Lana Pudar wrote history in the women's 200m fly by taking Bosnia Hercegovina's first ever European gold. She had got his nation's first medal in the 100m, a bronze, after she had collected medals in all three fly events a year ago among the juniors (and also this July in Otopeni). She chose to rush ahead early on, and she could keep 0.49sec from her lead by the end, Denmark's Helena Bach and Italy's Ilaria Cusinato got the minor spoils.

The emperor stroke back on Alberto Razzetti who had beaten Hungary's 4-time champion David Verraszto on the opening day in the 400m IM. Over the last two days two Magyars took revenge, first Richard Marton passed him in the finish in the 200m fly to take the second place and now Hubert Kos denied him for the IM double by 0.10sec. Besides getting consoled for two 4th place finishes earlier (400m IM, 100m fly), Kos brought back the 200m IM crown to Hungary after 2014 when Laszlo Cseh had claimed his fifth straight title in this event.

Germany had to wait till this last day to finally snatch gold – and they bagged two in a span of ten minutes by winning both 400m free events. Isabel Gose caused one of the biggest upsets of the championships by halting Simone Quadarella's triumphant march after eight straight wins since 2018. The Italian was set to complete the triple-triple – winning the 400-800-1500m free in the third straight edition –, but couldn't match Gose's speed. Hungary's Ajna Kesely, who had lost by 0.22sec in Glasgow 2018 to Quadarella, took the bronze from lane 1. Being such a superpower as the Germans, it sounds a bit unbelievable that after ruling the 90s, they had to wait 25 years to see one of their female swimmers on the podium again in this event.

The men's race turned into a feast for them – Lukas Maertens, runner-up in the 800m, set a new Championship Record while outpacing Switzerland Antonio Djakovic, Henning Muehlleitner secured a 1-3 finish for the Germans.

The usual meet-ending medley relays saw Sarah Sjostrom expanding her medal count to 28 – it was her fifth here and fittingly it was a gold again. At the halfway mark, Italy was way ahead thanks to Pilato's brilliant breaststroke leg – but the rivals gained 2sec on the hosts over the fly, so it was all even before the freestyle where Sjostrom blew the field away. Even the Dutch managed to pass the Italians, indeed Marrit Steenbergen anchored them to get the bronze, a 7th medal for her in Rome.

Then the stands were rocking again as the men's relay was the exclusive playing field of the hosts. Their magnificent four had staged arguably the biggest upset at the Worlds in June by winning this event – and the perfect storm had its impact again. Having the two individual 100m champions of the respective strokes over the first legs, Ceccon and Martinenghi, gave them a substantial lead. And even though they had the 31 year-old Matteo Rivolta for the fly, the veteran flew with the youngsters and clocked the best split too before the 100m free bronze medallist Alessandro Miressi had a 47.17 blast. Italy won by 4.04sec, the largest margin since ages, set a new CR and halted the Brits' run of four consecutive victories.

This win crowned the home team's outstanding performance. It was title No. 13 – two more than the Brits' record from Budapest 2021 and Italy also bettered their own record set last year for a total of 27 medals, to land 35 (13-13-9). Their overwhelming dominance is mirrored by the fact that they got more medals than the next two ranked countries combined. Hungary (5-7-3) and Great Britain (4-5-6) claimed 15 apiece – so it was also inevitable that Italy won the Team Trophy again, ahead of France, GB and Hungary.

The individual awards went to David Popovici – the Romanian had a promising heat in the 400m but later withdrew due to fatigue and the junior Worlds are also coming soon – and Lithuania's Ruta Meilutyte; based on FINA points, the top performances were rewarded. Popovici got more, though: the two golds earned him €5.000, while his record bonuses amount €15.000 (five for the 100m ER in the semis and ten for the WR in the final), so he leaves Rome with €20,000.

Diving

Ukraine's Sofia Lyskun went through the same pains as a day earlier in the mixed 10m – with Oleksii Sereda, they had led till the last round only to see the Brits overtake them with their final dive. And it happened again in the individual event. Lyskun did well, and even though her penultimate attempt wasn't brilliant, still kept the lead as Andrea Spendolini Sirieix's jump was way better but with a much lower DD. However, this gave the Brit the necessary confidence for the last round where her DD was higher and even though Lyskun performed a fine one, Spendolini Sirieix came up with another fantastic attempt and got a couple of more 8.0s to have the highest scoring jump of the afternoon (76.80). Ultimately her 3.2DD – vs Lyskun's 3.0 – earned her the winning margin of 3.80 points. Germany's Christina Wassen got the bronze.

By then, the Germans already bagged their first title here, proving that there is still life after the retirement of their most trusted delivery man, 17-time European champion Patrick Hausding. Lou Massenberg and Tina Punzel took the lead in the third round and never give it away till the end despite the battle was quite tight. The gap was 3-4 points after each round, but the Germans kept their nerves and their British chasers behind – at the end they won with 3.93 points, here the Italians took the bronze medal.

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