

European Aquatics Championships, Rome (ITA), Day 2 – Summary

Gold feast for Italy, Dutch double and ER blast for Popovici

Italy bettered the Netherlands 4-2 in the title-race on Day 2, but the second day's biggest blast came in the men's 100m free semis. Romanian Rocket David Popovici bettered the European record (and his junior WR) with a 46.98 blast, becoming the first European to go sub-47sec in textile. The women's 100m title went to Dutchwoman Marrit Steenbergen who claimed three golds in two days already. Italy grabbed a 5th title earlier when Giorgio Minisini won the historical first male solo event in artistic swimming. Among the women, Ukraine ruled the day once more, Marta Fiedina landed her third gold as well, came first in the solo technical, then in the highlights routine with her team-mates.

Swimming

A year ago, David Popovici stole the show here in the pool as he rewrote the junior world record-list in the freestyle events at the junior Europeans while making the 50-100-200 triple. This June, the 17 year-old established himself as the brightest star of Europe's next-gen swimmers by doubling down the 100-200m free titles at the FINA World Championships (the first one to achieve that after 1973), then entertained the home crowd in Otopeni at the junior Europeans three weeks ago (grabbed four titles) before returning to Rome.

And once he graced the scene, he launched a rocket in the morning heats, setting a new Championship Record (47.20, 0.07sec shy of his junior WR set in Budapest), then came the semis and he was really in the mood, stopping the clock at 46.98. This is a new European record (Kliment Kolesnikov held the previous one with 47.11), a new junior WR – and he is the first-ever European under 47sec in textile suits. He sits 4th on the all-time ranks, Cesar Cielo's WR – set in this very same pool 13 years ago – stands at 46.91, Frenchman Alain Bernard had a 46.94 (both from the shiny era, though the latter was never ratified as ER), and at the 2019 Worlds USA's superman Caeleb Dressel swam 46.96 (that is the current textile-best).

The finals saw a brilliant run of the home swimmers. Italy's best female deliverers from the past Europeans were Margherita Panziera in the 200m back (winning also in 2018 and 2021) and Simona Quadarella in the longer free distances (completing trebles in Glasgow and Budapest). And they didn't disappoint the home fans this time either – Panziera opened Italy's march, seeing off Britain's Katie Shanahan who just went on collecting medals in the Foro Italico after starring in Rome last year, grabbing six medals at the juniors. Hungary's Dora Molnar – who was the top performer this year's juniors in Otopeni with 6 medals as well – claimed her first-ever podium at the elite level.

Quadarella expanded her golden streak at Europeans to 7/7, Isabel Gose of Germany challenged her in the 800m free, but the title-holder held on firmly. Another young hero from last year's Rome juniors, Merve Tuncel of Turkey – having excelled over the same distances as Quadarella both in 2021 and 2022 – bagged her first senior European medal too.

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Italian men also brought the expected wins. One of the hosts' most versatile swimmers Thomas Ceccon won the 50m fly, just weeks after his world record-beating swim in the 100m back – ahead of France's Maxime Grousset and Portugal's Diogo Ribeiro.

After title-holder Adam Peaty had skipped the Worlds due to his foot injury, his European throne was also vacated – and just like in Budapest, Nicolo Martinenghi took over the reign in the 100m breast. A bit unexpectedly, the crowd could cheer for a 1-2 finish as Federico Poggio stunned many by finishing runner-up. Only the battle for the bronze was fierce, five finalists hit the wall within 0.18sec. Lithuania's Andrius Sidlauskas out-touched the others, including GB's James Wilby, who had beaten Peaty at the Commonwealth Games and Dutchman Arno Kamminga who had to settle for the 7th place, despite being considered the biggest threat on Peaty's magical run a year ago as the second man ever clocking a time starting with 57sec (now he swam 59.68).

Still, the Dutch – including Kamminga – had a couple of golden moments in the evening. Marrit Steenbergen was no match for the others in the 100m free, beat France's Charlotte Bonnet and GB's Freya Anderson with ease, then she returned to anchor the Netherlands' mixed medley relay to another convincing victory. Thus, Steenbergen clinched three golds in two days here (came first with the 4x200m free relay as well), and Kamminga also had some consolation. Though Italy's relay featured two freshly crowned champions, Martinenghi and Ceccon, in the second half of the race their advantage gradually decreased and Steenbergen outpaced Silvia di Pietro over the free leg. Indeed, while the Dutch clocked 53.24 in the individual final and geared up for a 52.33 split in the relay, di Pietro couldn't hit a higher speed at all (54.18, then 54.17). Thanks to that, the Dutch won by 1.88sec – while the Brits, without Peaty's usual input, finished third after three straight triumphs.

Artistic Swimming

Another milestone was passed in the afternoon when the first-ever male solo event kicked off at the European Championships. The historical title went to Giorgio Minisini, as expected – the Italian, multiple medal-winner at World and European Champs in mixed duet – performed his routine under the title 'The Plastic Sea', a special effort to call people's attention to the devastating pollution of the world's oceans. Spain's Fernando Diaz got the silver while Serbia's Ivan Martinovic finished third – both competed at this level for the first time. The medal ceremony was filled with emotions, Minisini dropped some tears while he was announced as the first-ever male solo European champion.

The other two finals didn't offer any upset either. Ukraine grabbed two more titles, Marta Fiedina won the solo technical, then half an hour later was also part of the highlight routine, where their usual high throws and brilliant dives were really highlights of the session. Italy and France got the minor spoils.

Linda Cerruti brought another silver for Italy, while Vasiliki Alexandri of Austria managed to earn more points than Greece's Evangelia Platanioti. At the World Champs they finished in reverse order, now the bronze meant the world for the soloist of the Alexandri triplets. Bouncing back from a serious illness she had contacted here in Rome, the Austrian was all tears after learning that she finally claimed a medal at a major event.

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