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Perth for the second time, Thorpe for the first: throwback to the 8th FINA World Championships

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A 15-year-old Australian boy and a 21-year-old Australian boy of Polish descent were the protagonists of the 8th FINA World Championships. Obviously there were numerous outstanding athletes, but the gold medals of Ian Thorpe and Michael Klim and the dominance of the latter one made this event remarkable. Americans were ranked first in the medal table, there was a gold medal claimed by a Costa Rican athlete, 2 bronze medals went to athletes from Puerto Rico while Hungary won a gold by Ágnes Kovács. Here is a summary of the second world championships in Perth.

The best athletes of aquatics returned to the venue of previous world championships, many of them had participated in both world championships hosted by Perth as the two events were organised within a quite short period. However, there was a significant difference between the two: in 1991 there were only 60 whereas in 1998 there were 121 countries participated in the championships. It was a major growth, however, in 1994 104 nations took part in the championships in Rome.

Because of the Australian location the event took place in January again, the key venue was the Challenge Stadium previously called as Perth Superdrome and referred to as HBF Stadium today.



Three new events debuted in the programme: 3m and 10m synchronised diving and 5 km open water swimming. Altogether 1371 athletes participated in the competitions in Perth.

Americans could claim the highest number of gold medals (17 of them, in addition to 6 silver and 9 bronze medals), Russia ranked second in the medal table with 11-3-3 and the host country, Australia finished third. There was nothing to be ashamed of, Australia won 7 gold, 8 silver and 10 bronze medals, 8 medals more than Russians. Altogether 21 nations were represented on the podium. The Hungarian team claimed 1 gold, 1 silver and 2 bronze medals in Perth.

Swimming - Klim-parade

Four years later Alexander Popov could continue only partially what he had started in 1994 in Rome. Although in 100m freestyle he defended his title (beating Michael Klim and Lars Frolander from Sweden), he finished only second in 50m after the American Bill Pilczuk and won a bronze as a member of the Russian relay squad.

The key character among men in Perth was undoubtedly the host, Michael Klim, who became world champion in 200m freestyle and 100m butterfly, as well as a member of the 4x200m freestyle and the 4x200 medley relay squad. In addition, he claimed a silver for 100m freestyle and for the 4x100 freestyle relay and he shared a bronze with Ricardo Busquets from Costa Rica (!) for 50m freestyle.

Altogether it makes 7 medals for the Gdynia-born world class swimmer who became an Olympic champion (for the 2 relays) and finished 2nd in 100m butterfly and medley relay 2 years later down under again, but this time on the northern shore, in Sydney.

Two more excellent Australian swimmers' performance is worth noting, namely Grent

Hackett becoming world champion in 1500m freestyle and 4x200 freestyle relay and winning a silver medal for 400m freestyle. But who could beat him in this event by 15 hundredths?

Well, in 400m freestyle the local Ian Thorpe, youngest ever world champion swimmer finished first. He won the gold at the age of 15 years and 3 months (he became a champion as a member of the 4x200 relay, also) and continued to have great achievements later on, as well. At the following world championships in Fukuoka in 2001 for instance he claimed six (!) gold medals, prior to that in Sydney he became three-time Olympic champion. No question, his career and popularity kicked off there, in Perth.

Two gold medals went to the American Lenny Krayzelburg, there was no one to beat him in 100m and 200m backstroke so he definitely dominated this style of swimming.

As for women's swimming Jenny Thompson (also from the US) could claim double gold medals in 100m freestyle and 100m butterfly, on top of that she won 2 more gold medals in relay making her the most successful female swimmer in Perth.

Those surprised by the Costa Rican bronze in men's swimming might have been even more amazed by the gold of Claudia Poll arriving first in 200m freestyle ahead of the Slovakian Martina Moravcova and the Australian Julia Greville. She is the sole Olympic champion of the country, she won the same heat in 1996, Atlanta.

Kristy Kowalt shall also be highlighted, the American breaststroker finished first in 100m and was beaten by Ágnes Kovács (becoming an Olympic champion later) but she could still win another gold in the medley relay. After a powerful introduction in Rome the German Franziska van Almsick had to settle for the relay gold and silver medals, she could not make it to the top in solo.

Open water swimming - splendid performance by a Russian

The Russian Aleksey Akatyev's achievements in Perth are remarkable, he excelled in both 5km and 25km, taking advantage of the debut of the former one. 80 competitors of 26 countries swam in the ocean, the remaining 4 medals for men were distributed among 4 nations (Australian, Spanish, Italian and Argentinian swimmers), regarding women, the American Erica Rose finished first in 5 km and her peer, Tobie Smith claimed gold in 25 km. The German Peggy Büsche performed a great feat winning a bronze in the shorter and a silver in the longer distance.

Synchronised swimming - Russians on top for the first time

Russians, dominating synchro currently, could stand on the top of the podium for the first time and did so in 3 events. Regarding solos, Olga Sedakova claimed gold, the duet by her and her partner, Olga Brusnikina finished first in the category and their synchro team proved to be the best, as well, beating the Japanese and the Americans. Interestingly enough, France was also among the medallists (for the first time) thanks to the star of the

discipline, Virginie Dedieu (she and her partner, Myriam Lignot claimed gold in the duet).

Diving - Russian dominance

Half of the gold medals went to Russia thanks to the legendary Dmitri Sautin among others, who won both the 3 and 10m events, as for women, Irina Lashko and Yuliya Pakhalina could claim two gold medals, the former won in 3m the latter one in 10m, and in duet they topped the debuting 3m synchronised diving event, also.

Contrary to previous patterns the German divers did their best, too, which was not so typical of them earlier. They won the silver in 2 synchro events, in addition, Holger Schleppe (1 m) and Jan Hempel (3 m) could also stand on the podium. The highest number of gold medals (3) for men was claimed by China.

As for women, both the solo and the synchro 10m events were won by the Ukrainian Olena Zhupina. In addition, the world championships featured four Chinese silver and two American bronze medals in diving.

Water polo - Spain and Italy on top for the first time

The Spanish team could reach the top for the first time. Their success was well deserved as they won all their matches. The national team marked with the name of Manuel Estiarte with the excellent goalkeeper, Jesus Rollan, who deceased tragically a few years later, defeated Yugoslavia 5-3 in the prelims and beat the European champion, Hungary 6-4 in the final. Italians, the defending champions had to settle with the fifth place.

Concerning women, the Hungarian team excelling in Rome could not defeat their title against the Australians in the quarterfinals. Still the hosting team could not make it to the finals because the Italian team defeated them in the semi-finals by one goal (10-9) which was quite a surprise regarding that Italy had been defeated 3 times in the group matches: by Hungary 11-10, by Greece 10-4 (!), and by the Netherlands 6-5. Nevertheless, they could reach a new level by their victory against Canada in the quarterfinals, proving that the quarterfinals of world championships represent a completely different challenge.

The finals favoured Italians, again, they defeated the Netherlands 7-6, Settebello became a world champion for the first time in spite of qualifying for the best 8 as 4th from the group.