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10th FINA World Championships: back to Spain

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After the first time in 1986 in Madrid Spain hosted the FINA World Championships for the second time in 2003. Here is a summary about the World Championships in Barcelona including the victory of Popov, Stockbauer, Phelps, Thorpe, De Brujin, Klotchkova and the world champion title claimed by the Hungarian national water polo team after 30 years among others.

The 10th FINA World Championships were held between 12 and 27 July, 2003 in Barcelona. 2015 athletes of 134 countries competed in 62 disciplines. The number of participants breached the barrier of 2000 for the first time. The free routine combination synchronised swimming made its debut this time, the number of women's water polo teams increased from 8 to 16. The United States topped the medal table (12 gold, 13 silver and 6 bronze), Russia came second (10-5-6) and Australia finished third (8-12-6).

The Hungarian delegation claimed 1 gold, 4 silver and 1 bronze. Men's water polo team won, László Cseh gained his first World Championships medal (a silver in 400m medley) beaten by Michael Phelps, whereas Mihály Flaska claimed a bronze medal in 50m breaststroke. As for women, Éva Risztov took the biscuit: she claimed silver in 400m freestyle, 200m butterfly and 400m medley.

Swimming - brilliant performance by Stockbauer

As for women's swimming the German delegation proved to be the most successful one with 4 victories, **Hannah Stockbauer** won three individual freestyle events (400, 800 and 1500 m), she swam World Championships record times in the latter two, while Antje Buschschulte excelled in 100 m backstroke. With her three gold medals the swimming lady from Nuremberg earned not only the best female swimmer of the World Champs title but in 2003 she won the title of best athlete of the year by Swimming World Magazine and in her home country, Germany she was awarded as the best female athlete. Hannah did a great job 2 years earlier in Fukuoka, she clinched gold in 800 and 1500 m and bronze in 400 m, and to make her pedigree complete she won a silver as well, in 4X200 freestyle relay. The peak of her career, however, came in Barcelona for sure, where she earned 3 World Champion titles in individual events. A year later she claimed a bronze only in 4X200 m freestyle relay the Athens Olympics. In 2005 she retired from the sport and continued as a coach in Duisburg.



Palau Sant Jordi

Although **Yana Klochkova** from the Ukraine won one less gold in Barcelona than Stockbauer did, during her entire career she arrived first as many as 40 times in the course of Olympics, World and European Championships so she was also one of the protagonists of the Championships in Barcelona. Practically no one could beat her in her key strongest event, 400 m medley at major tournaments between 1999 and 2004 and the same would be true about the 200 m event if she had won the 200 m event and not the 400 m freestyle at the World Championships in Fukuoka.

The victory of the Chinese **Luo Xue-juan** in 50 and 100 m breaststroke was obvious, just like 2 years earlier, in Fukuoka. Prior to the World Championships the Chinese breaststroker aimed at breaching the 1:06.52 record of the South African swimmer, Penelope Heyns of 1999 in the longer course. The world record was broken in Barcelona, but as a matter of fact it was not her but the Australian Leisel Jones and not in the final but already in the prelims. Hence the finals did not see Luo Xue-juan as the holder of the new world record (1:06.37) but Jones who became the most potential winner at once. Worthy of a world champion Luo started the final extremely fast in the first 50m, with 30.87 she was virtually inimitable, whereas Jones finished only third with 1:07.47.

The third lady to clinch 2 medals was the Dutch swimmer, **Inge de Bruijn** claiming gold both in 50 m butterfly and 50 m freestyle.

One of the most remarkable events for women was that of the 50 m backstroke where the local favourite, **Nina Zhivanevskaya** won.

Regarding freestyle events for men we might as well say that **Aleksandr Popov** entered the pool to fight against the Australians. He won the 2 shortest sprint races (50 and 100 m freestyle) while other 4 gold medals were claimed by Australian swimmers **Ian Thorpe** (200 and 400 m) and **Grant Hackett** (800 m and 1500 m). After a rather poor performance at the Australian Championships Thorpe excelled in Barcelona, in addition to his two individual gold medals he claimed another one in 4X200 freestyle relay, a bronze in 100 m and a silver in 200 m medley.

100m freestyle final:

Two years earlier he made sports history by becoming the first athlete to collect 6 gold medals at the same World Championships. In Barcelona he set a new record by becoming the first swimmer to gain world champion title three consecutive times in the same event (400 m freestyle). The 200 m freestyle was rather challenging for him as the Dutch swimmer, Pieter van den Hoogenband was ahead of him by world record time at half distance. However, in the second leg the Australian world champion took back the lead and won with the time of 1:45.14.

The American backstroker, **Aaron Peirsol** doubled, too and triumphed in 100 and 200 m, in addition, he claimed gold in 4X100 m medley relay. 100 as well as 200 m breaststroke events were won by the Japanese **Kosuke Kitajima**.

Michael Phelps and Ian Thorpe in 200m IM:

The most successful male swimmer of individual events at the World Championships was **Michael Phelps** clinching three gold medals. He excelled in 200 m butterfly, 200 and 400 m medley, claimed silver in 100 m butterfly. He won gold in 4x100 medley relay, however he did not swim in the final. However, as a member of the 4X200 m freestyle relay squad he claimed silver by actually participating. It goes without saying that he broke world records one after the other. The first one in 200 m butterfly prelims breaching his previous record of 1:54.58 with 1:53.93 becoming the first swimmer to go under 1:54.00. The next day he could win the final without extra effort but of course, it was far behind his time of the previous day. A day later in the prelims again he broke his previous record in 200 m medley and set a new one at 1:57.52, but it did not take him long to break it again: the final, next day, saw his triumph setting a new record again at 1:56.04. Then came the 100 m butterfly event of unexpected excitement. As usual, Phelps broke the record in the prelims with his time of 51.47. Similarly to the previous case, the newly set record was not held for long. The scenario this time saw a surprising twist and it was not Phelps but fellow swimmer, **Ian Crocker** who breached it and won the event. By his incredible time of 50.98 he made sports history becoming the first swimmer to go under 51 seconds. As a cooling down Phelps won the 400 m medley final by the record time of 4:09.09.

Open water swimming - Russian dominance

All three open water swimming events were won by Russian swimmers. As for women, the Italian Viola Valli doubled by excelling in 5 and 10 km alike. The Dutch Edith Van Dijk claimed gold in 25 km.

Diving - gold by Sautin, Chinese glory continued

Compared to preceding scenarios this time diving saw some changes. Although Chinese divers made extraordinary performances again, their dominance was not so obvious any more. Considering men for instance, it was only Xiang Xu to become world champion in 1 m, the Russian Aleksander Dobroskok doubled by triumphing 3 m as well as 3 m synchro with Dmitrij Sautin. Gold in 10 m was claimed by the Canadian diver, Alexandre Despatie, 10 m synchro was won by an Australian duet. Regarding women Asian divers maintained their hegemony, 4 out of 5 events saw Chinese winners. It was only the 1 m event where an Australian lady, Irina Lashko could top the podium.

Synchronised swimming - Dedieu's victory

The French synchro swimmer, Virginie Dedieu clinched a gold, while the Japanese duet of Miya Tacibana and Miho Takeda excelled in the duet event. The team routine was won by Russia while the combo saw the victory of Japan.

Water polo - Hungarian gold after 30 years

Men's water polo final was fought by Hungary and Italy. Scores remained 8-8 even at the end of full time and the extra time (3-1) saw the brilliant performance of Dénes Kemény's team beating Italy 11-9. The Hungarian team became world champion exactly 30 years after the first World Championships victory of 1973 in Beograd. Interestingly enough, 10 years after their victory in Barcelona the team claimed its third gold here again. Norbert Madaras participated in both victories in Barcelona.

Men's final:

As for women, the team of the US triumphed over the Italian team.