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Favourites of open water swimming

Simone Ruffini: The swimmer with a big heart

2017.01.26. 10:55 CET

Simone Ruffini is one of the great heroes of open water swimming. The 27-year-old Italian athlete won the 25 km race at the 2015 FINA World Championships under really special circumstances: he suffered from nausea and vomiting, but still managed to finish first. He will be among the favourites at the 2017 World Championships in Balatonfüred as well.

There are a couple of swimmers who have been in love with water since their childhood, but Simone Ruffini is an exception. His mother forced him to go swimming as a child, even though he did not like it.

The little Simone's opinion about water had slowly changed in a positive way, and he began to win school and youth competitions. Finally, he also had an idol: two-time long-course and two-time short-course world champion as well as 17-time European champion Filippo Magnini.

His first big international result was winning the gold medal in the team's event of the 2008 European Youth Championships in France. The 2010 European Championships in Balatonfüred was a really successful one for him, since he finished second in the team competition and third in 5 km in a dead heat with Spyridon Gianniotis of Greece.

'I like Balatonfüred very much, because the city is very important in my career due to the fact that I won my first senior international medal there in 2010' - said Ruffini to Bp2017. However, it was not his last pleasant experience by the Lake Balaton...

Ruffini won gold in 10 km at the 2011 Universiade, and his next big triumph came in 2015 at the FINA World Championships in Kazan, where he produced one of the most memorable victories in the history of open water swimming. He suffered from nausea while competing in 25 km. He vomited twice during the opening lap, but he still went on to finish in first place.

'I told my coach already at the second feeding station that I was not feeling well. I felt nauseous and I vomited twice. Once I calmed down, I just tried to continue in a nice routine

and take each lap at a time.' - he told the reporter of The Guardian just after the race.

Ruffini finished sixth at the 2016 Olympics in 10 km, but he won the FINA/HOSA Marathon Swimming World Cup Series, winning among others the leg held in Balatonfüred.

'I do not set determined expectations for myself for this year's World Championships, I'll get to Balatonfüred and try to do my best. I hope to swim in 10km and 25km, too, because I like both distances.' - Ruffini added.

SIMONE RUFFINI

Born: Tolentino (Italy), 7 December, 1989

Medal record:

World champion (2015 Kazan, 25 km)

Universiade champion (2011 Shenzhen, 10 km)

World Cup winner (2016)

European silver medallist (2010 Balatonfüred, team event)

European bronze medallist (2010 Balatonfüred, 5 km)