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Kazan looks ahead to the Swimming World Cup on 1 – 3 November

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Millennium city in the heart of Russia is building anticipation to welcome the penultimate leg of the 2019 FINA Swimming World Cup.

Taking relay from Berlin, Germany, Kazan will reverberate to the rhythms and energy of the swiftest and smartest swimmers on the planet, serving a dress-rehearsal or rather heating the bottom for the final meet of the current circuit, as the climax is set to take place four days after Kazan's meet in Doha.

The usual 34 sets of medals are at stake for the 272 athletes of 53 nations, alongside the World Cup's ranking points and the Olympic trips, which will definitely be kept somewhere at the back of the mind of all the ambitious competitors. Looking at the list, there are a good number of sound names confirmed for the Kazan's leg, including two out of the three "most victorious swimmers of all times" of the FINA World Cup.

Read on to learn more on the decorated swimmers and stories to follow in Kazan.



Star backstrokers in action

Heading the women backstrokers list of Kazan is the two time Olympic and five time world champion Emily Seebohm of Australia. She harvested a lot during the first cluster of the 2019 FINA Swimming World Cup, standing on 6 backstroke gold, one silver and two bronze medals. However, her steady pace was not so far always the fastest. Posting the season's best for the 100m back in Singapore on 15 August, 2019, 59.43, her winning times were outdone: in Berlin by the Dutch Kyra Toussaint, finishing after 27.49 for the shortest race, and Ruck Taylor of Canada, in the 200m backstroke – 2:08.21. Although we will not have the pleasure of seeing the mighty Canadian in Kazan, the battle is going to be exciting. Hungarian queen Katinka Hosszu (resting on a full set of medals in 100m events), Australian Kaylee McKeown (freshly crowned world vice champion in 200m backstroke, 2:02.26), Russian Daria Vaskina (2019 world's bronze medalist on 27.51) and Maria Kameneva (silver in 100m and bronze in 50m back of the Leg#4), and Lena Grabowski of Austria (silver in 200m back of the SWC in Berlin) will all be competitive in terms of the clash on gold.

For the men's chart, the sprint will be a sequel of Morozov vs. Andrew story or rather the mighty two will turn on the moon gear, one more time to throw challenge to the rest of the world. The Red machine, collecting each gold on offer, and currently #1 after two clusters, will show his best swimming on the home turf, and maybe even outdo his World Cup's record time registered in Singapore on Leg#3, 24.40. American, resting on four silvers slightly behind his rival, reveals good shape and is definitely fit for another run. Surprises are definitely in store for the 100m and 200m races. The most successful mid-distance back-stroker of the season, awarding six golds, 2019 world's bronze medalist Australian Mitchell Larkin, chose not to come, as well as his biggest challenger, Ryosuke Irie of Japan, who posted the swiftest time in 100m in Berlin, 53.26, 100m backstroke world champions Xu Jiayu and 200 backstroke Gwangju title holder Evgeny Rylov. So, we may assume, that the door is left open for the new names to appear here on the sky.



A freestyle challenge

New names on the podium will definitely appear in the 400m freestyle women, as Kazan's race will not see any awardee of the 2019 Swimming World Cup, unlike on the shorter course, where Russian hope Veronika Andrusenko and Zsuzsanna Jakabos of Hungary both found themselves on the top of the chart, alongside three minor merits for Jakabos. Michelle Coleman, #3 in the overall chart after two clusters, is viewed as an all-round favorite on "all ranges", as she already proved her universality through three gold in sprint, seven silver and two bronze pieces. On the 100m race here is a big challenge for her in the face of the overall leader Cate Campbell, silver medalist of the 2019 World Championships, who set the bar in the Swimming World Cup as high as 52.34 in Jinan, China, however her 24.26 of Berlin and 24.11 snatching WCH-2019 bronze podium in the freestyle sprint shall be no easy match for the opponents. Among them will be another 2019 circuit medalist and WCH-2019 runner-up Maria Kameneva of Russia, 24.31.

Danas Rapsys of Lithuania, currently #2 in the overall chart, is expected to dominate the men's swimming freestyle 200 and 400ies, just like Vladimir Morozov – 50 and 100ies to add to their already vast collection of 9 and 10 golds respectively. They are not only the most victorious on their paths, setting the bars early in the first cluster.

Keep an eye on the reigning Russian champion Ilya Druzhinin in the longest race of the competition, 14:59.86, whereas 800m freestyle favorite for women is currently Yukimi Moriyama of Japan, landing on 3rd at home at the inaugural SWC 2019 leg, 8:32.40.

The Queen of Medley is back in Kazan



Unlike the men's part, all key players will be on the stage in the women's individual medley. Reigning world champion Katinka Hosszu of Hungary, who is just 3 points behind Campbell in the overall SWC ranking, shall be well fit to stretch her titles tally, already counting 10 golds in the individual medley events. She clocked WC seasons' best on 200m in Singapore, Leg #3, incomparable 2:08.63, and on Leg #1 for 400m – 4:32.30 and her world title was sealed in marvelous 4:30.39. Her teammate and friend Zsuzsana Jakabos, runner-up of the 400m IM world championships race, sitting on seven silver and one bronze pieces so far, Russian all-rounder Vitalina Simanova and Italian Ilaria Cusinato will also be a part of the medals game, although it will be a very challenging task for them to match the Queen. The mighty Hungarians will also be the key stars of 200m fly events. Jeanette Ottesen and Cate Campbell will eye winning the shorter races, definitely competing against another Magyar Evelin Verraszto. The very Simanova can be viewed as the main contender for the breaststroke titles in the absence of mid-distance specialists South African Shoenmaker and Ida Hullko of Finland, who set the season's high for 200m and 100m breaststroke respectively, 2:22.35 and 1:04.42, and also the Jamaican sprinter Alia Atkinson, sealing 30.31 on 50m.

Some more names to watch include Arno Kamminga, who has entered the World Cup right after the season hit its midst, and managed to fill in the gap very soon, finishing atop of all breaststroke races in Budapest and Berlin, except for one in 50m, where he won silver.

On the fly part, a high profile race is expected in the sprint, seeing the full podium of Berlin (Andrew, Szabo – 22.93 on leg 2, and Zhilkin) in action.



A worthy assembly in the mixed relays

The mixed relay events shall be a four-way battle between Hungary, Australia, Russia and, very likely, Belarus. Hungarians will showcase the strongest individual line-up coming out of the long bench, however they have never been victorious in the medley relay this circuit, recording two silver and one gold on the free stroke. Aussie sharks with Emily Seebohm and Campbell Bronte, which were substituting each other, in the roster, grabbed three golds and three silvers, posting the best time, 3:24.89, at the start of the season. Campbell was in mixed four to finish slightly behind world record American quartet at the World Championships and sealed silver in the free style relay, 3:19.97. Russians are in full swing, likely to play one more time the world championships quartet, composed of Grinev, Morozov, Kameneva and Ustinova, which stood up disappointingly close to the podium on the 5th clocking 3:22. 82. However, there is a good room for variations, and such stars like Aleksandr Krasnykh, Vladimir Morozov and Daria Chikunova can definitely add up to the show and steal the moonlight.

All in all, a swimming week-end in Kazan will see an impressive 53 nations registered to participate, including such powerhouses like Australia and Hungary, sitting well ahead of others at the top of the chart on 40 and 27 golds, and 84 and 79 medals overall respectively. Russia, USA, the Netherlands, Japan and Lithuania complete the top seven, counting double-digit gold pieces.

Dr. Julio Maglione, FINA President:

We have all stars in place here in Kazan, which is not a mere coincidence. Organising Committee is always working very hard to provide athletes with the best possible conditions. In 2015 we have staged here one of the most successful FINA World Championships, which gave a great impetus for the tremendous development of the aquatic sports in the area. What we see now is the legacy of seven Olympic swimming pools in Kazan only, and over 200 in the region, which is a very impressive figure.

Vladimir Salnikov, Russian Swimming Federation President:

For us it is a big honor to host FINA aegis events. We are happy that Kazan is now getting promoted more and more at the international swimming arena. In 2015 a few new about Kazan, and now it is quite well known. Therefore, the list of competitors is pretty impressive, and I am sure all fans of Kazan will appreciate their participation in the Kazan's Leg.

Vladimir Morozov, Russia, leader of the overall SWC-2019 men's ranking after Leg#5:

Since the Russian Championships is scheduled in a few days after the FINA Swimming World Cup in Kazan, and we may expect, that the competition here will be very tough. For me personally the tasks are high as usual, I will be satisfied to register all wins in all races I swim. I love swimming in Kazan. Every time we come here, we are treated like at home. For example, yesterday we visited a hockey match with participation of the local team, I had the honor to make a face-off, which was a unique experience.

Emily Seebohm, #5 in the overall SWC-2019 women's ranking after Leg#5:

I am happy to be in Kazan. There is a good number of top swimmers in the game. The competition will definitely be very interesting and exciting, and of course, we will very much appreciate it if people of Kazan will come and support us. My goals here are not just about getting points, all we try to improve time, because the Olympics are not long away, and this is all about training, and, of course, I always hope that I can do something that I have not done before.

Formula

As usual, the FINA Swimming World Cup's meet will consist of two mixed team relays and 32 individual events, including 100m, 200m, 400m - Individual Medley, 50m, 100m, 200m, 400m, 800m (W), 1500m – freestyle (M), 50m, 100m, 200m – Backstroke, Breaststroke, and Butterfly. The three days story will see heats in the morning and finals in the evenings. Unlimited events can be swum by a swimmer and only the best three results (per meet points) will count towards the ranking/scoring.

Launched in 1988, the FINA Swimming World Cup gathers world-class swimmers in a series of two or three day meets organised between August and November each year. The circuit is structured in clusters (Middle East, Europe and Asia) and distributes a total of prize money reaching US\$ 2.5 million.

In 2019, the competition kicked-off on August, 2, in Tokyo (Japan), immediately after the conclusion of the 18th FINA World Championships in Gwangju (Korea) and concludes on November 9 in Doha (Qatar). Newcomer Jinan (CHN), Singapore (SGP), Budapest (HUN), Berlin (GER), and Kazan (RUS) complete the 2019 list of host cities, as the last two have been serving hosts for the fourth time.

Alongside medals and ranking points, there is a chance to earn an Olympic birth, meeting Olympic qualification time. A swimmer registering a world record shall receive bonuses: extra 20 points counted for the ranking and a prize money of US\$ 10,000.
