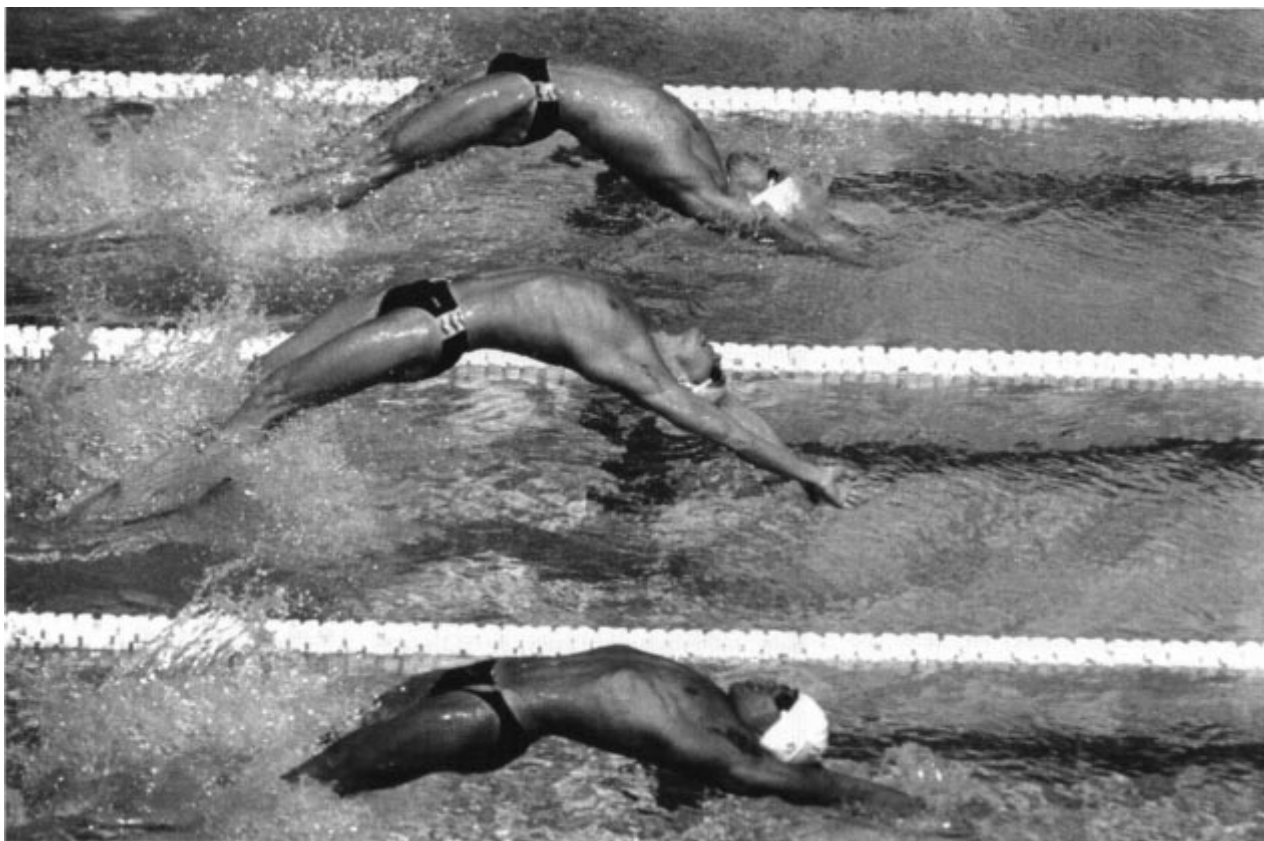


ELITE OF THE POOL IN PERTH (AUS)



By Alex Gilady

The World Swimming Championships were held in January in Perth, Australia, where the world's best competed in diving, swimming, synchronized swimming and water polo. The following tidbits were gathered during the competition.

The 11-member Hungarian swim team upstaged a newly unified German team and a resurgent U.S.A. delegation at the World Championships.

On the meet's first day, Hungary made waves when a virtual unknown, Norbert Rozsa, tied the world mark of 1'01"49 in

the morning heats of the 100m breaststroke. That evening, he lowered the record to 1'01"45, leaving Great Britain's Adrian Moorhouse, the previous world record holder, in his wake. He had to tell journalists how to spell his name. Incredibly, just 12 months ago, Rozsa was ranked 109th in the event. Later in the meet, he



added to his already impressive performance by finishing second in the 200m breaststroke.

With Rozsa, the Hungarian raid on the record books had begun, and a more famous swimmer continued the assault. Tamas Darnyi, the 1988 Olympic champion in both individual medleys, annihilated his own 400m mark by 2"39 seconds in individual medley, defeating American Eric Namesnik in a time of 4'12"36. Darnyi has never been defeated in the event.

Darnyi, who is virtually blind in his left eye - the victim of an icy snowball in his youth - repeated the feat five days later in the 200m IM when he swept away American David Wharton's old standard of 2'00"11 with a time of 1'59"36. Namesnik again settled for silver. Darnyi also won the bronze medal in the 200m butterfly.

Two Hungarian 16-year-olds contributed three medals on the women's side. Olympic champion Kristina Egerszegi easily won both backstroke events and newcomer Tunde Szabo was runner-up to her roommate in the 100m back.

GROSS-BUSTER

Melvin Stewart is the United States' newest world record holder. Stewart dashed to a time of 1'55"69 in the 200m butterfly in Perth, slicing 55 hundredths of a second off the previous best. Stewart, a junior at the University of Tennessee, had been ranked No.1 in the world going into the meet, but all the pre-race hoopla had been focused on German Michael Gross, the defending Olympic champion, who announced that the World Championships would mark the end of his competitive career. Stewart reeled in Gross in the race's final 50 meters to break the German's world standard, set in 1986.

Gross, known as "The Albatross" because of his immense wingspan, leaves the sport with three Olympic gold medals and the distinction of having set 10 individual world records during his decade-long career. Gross capped his career with silver medals in both of the butterfly events, a gold in the 4x200m relay and a bronze in the 4x100m medley relay.



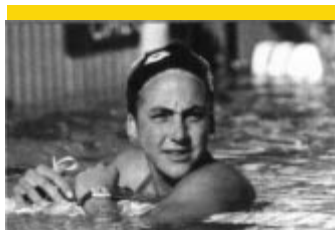
Norbert Rozsa, 1988 Olympic champion, began the series of records by Hungarians. Below, his compatriot Tamas Darnyi did just as well.



Catherine Plewinski of France, silver medal in the 50 m freestyle and bronze in the 100 m butterfly



Splendid results for the American Summer Sanders.



AFTER THE FALL

Amid cheers of "We have the best - the East and the West", Germany competed as one team for the first time at a major championship since reunification last year.

Expectations for the German swimming team were not high in the light of recent drugs allegations and complications arising from the merging of the East and West teams. Although the German women did not win a single individual gold medal and were awarded first in the 4x200m freestyle relay only after the United States was disqualified, observers were surprised and the Germans' quick recovery.

The German performance here was the most impressive in the U.S.A.' National Team Director Dennis Pursley said "They

have so much adversity to deal with. Their programme was in a shambles. Considering the circumstances, I think they were tremendous".

In all, the German women won nine medals, a huge decline when compared to the East German's medal monopoly at the 1986 World championships, where they won 13 of 16 events. In Perth, the United States led the women's competition with a total of 13 medals. Still, German teenagers like Jana Dorries, Jana Henke and Grit Mueller all won medals, giving Germany renewed hope for Barcelona.

HAYLE TO HAYLEY

Australia has its own version of Janet Evans, and she just may upset the prototype in the American's best events come 1992.

Teenage phenomenon Hayley Lewis, swimming in front of her compatriots, earned four medals at the World Championships. On the meet's first day, Lewis was edged by China's Lin Li in the 400m individual medley by one-hundredth of a second as Evans finished fourth. The Aussie bounced back to edge Evans in the 200m freestyle, but the American got revenge the next day when she handed Lewis a loss in the 400m freestyle by two-tenths of a second. The Australian finished up with a bronze in the 200m butterfly, while Evans won the 800m freestyle.

The results didn't surprise swimming observers from Down Under. Lewis won all five events she entered at the 1990 Commonwealth Games and has been touted as the "new Shane Gould", a reference to the Australian 15-year-old who won five medals at the 1972 Olympics.

Questions abound, however, about Lewis' commitment to the sport. Uncomfortable with the overwhelming media spotlight, she contemplated retirement following the Commonwealth Games. Joe King, Lewis' 79-year-old coach, has different ideas. He says Lewis, who will gain speed and strength as she physically matures, might hang around long enough to win the 50m and 100m freestyle at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta.

CLINCHING A BERTH IN PERTH

The U.S.A.'s water polo team travelled to Perth and returned with a ticket to Barcelona. By virtue of its fourth-place finish, the United States qualified for the 1992 Olympic tournament. Hungary edged the United States, 13-12, for the bronze medal.



Fu Mingxia, twelve year old champion.

It's never a surprise to see Yugoslavia, the 1984 and 1988 Olympic champion, standing on the victory platform. It happened yet again in Perth as the Yugoslavs won the gold medal. On this occasion, however, the runner-up was Spain, a relative newcomer to the water polo elite.

Under the guidance of Yugoslav Dragan Matutinovic, Spain won its first-ever medal in international water polo competition with a young squad that featured many players from the team that had captured the 1987 World Junior title. The current Spanish squad is anchored by veteran superstar Manuel Estiarte, the top goal-scorer of the past three Olympic Games.

The World Championship results could perhaps be reversed at the next major water polo competition, since the 1991 World Cup will be held in July on Spain's home turf in Barcelona.

FU FOR THOUGHT

Fu Mingxia looks like she belongs on the balance beam rather than the 10-meter platform. At 4 feet 10-1/4 inches, the petite Chinese diver could easily be mistaken for a gymnast. But when Fu was eight years old, sports officials told her that she was too old to begin a gymnastics career. They said diving, however, wasn't out of the question.

Four years later, Fu, now a mature 12 years of age, has climbed to the top of her second-choice sport. She won the platform title in Perth to become the youngest world diving champion ever.

Her 90-pound body appeared incapable of generating any splash when she entered the water, and she easily outdistanced runner-up Elena Miroshina of the Soviet Union, 426.51 to 402.87. It was only Fu's third international competition. She won the Goodwill Games title last August.

We won't see Fu for a while, however. At a congress during the World Championships, the sport's international federation

decided that from now on, divers must be 14 years old sometime in the year of competition in order to participate in major meets. This means Fu will not dive at the 1991 World Cup but will be eligible to compete at the 1992 Olympics.

Chinese officials did not tell Fu of the rule change in order to avoid upsetting her before the platform event in Perth. In fact, at the press conference after her victory, her coaches would not translate questions about her reaction to the new regulation.

DROWNED OUT

After the United States and Hungary tied 9-9 in an early water polo match, American two-meter man Chris Humbert said, "All in all, it was a pretty easy win for us".

15 MINUTES IS ALL IT TAKES

Something happened on the way to the finish of the men's 1,500m freestyle. Somebody other than Australians Glen Housman and Kieren Perkins was leading the race. And it would be somebody other than the two Aussies who would break the oldest world record in men's swimming.

Not only did the German Jorg Hoffmann break the seven-year mark by Vladimir Salnikov of the Soviet Union, he slashed it with a time of 14'50"36, more than four seconds better than the previous world best.

The race was billed as a match-up of Housman and Perkins, the other only two swimmers other than Salnikov to dip under the 15-minute mark in the event. During the contest Hoffmann and Perkins duelled throughout swimming's "metric mile", with the German winning by 22 hundredths of a second on the strength of his kick in the final 50 metres. Housman finished sixth, 22 seconds behind the leader.

A. G.