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Budapest hosts its third European Championships

Budapest (pps) No other city has been awarded European Championships by the European Swimming Federation, LEN, more often than Budapest. After the première in 1926 and in 1958 (both including water polo) the Hungarian capital hosts the title event in swimming and diving this year for the third time. Budapest could be said to stage even their fourth European championships, because the city also hosted the 2001 water polo Europeans on Margaret's Island. Water polo has been separated from the other disciplines since 1999. The only city besides Budapest that hosted European championships in all LEN disciplines more than once, is Vienna (1950, 1974, 1995).

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Swimming complex named in memory of Olympic champion

Budapest (pps) The 28th European Championships in Swimming, Diving and Synchronised Swimming are being held at the "Complex Alfred Hajos" in Budapest. Hungary thus honours its first Olympic swimming champion who won the gold medals in the 100m (1:22.2min) and the then usual 1,200m freestyle (18:22.2min) at the age of 18 at the first modern Olympic Games in Athens in 1896. Alfred Hajos had learned to swim only five years previously after his father drowned in the Danube.

But Alfred Hajos was successful not only in swimming. In 1902 he was a member of the Hungarian national football team, and later became a famous architect, who, among other things, designed the first pool of the swimming complex, a still existing 33.3m indoor pool, on Margaret's Islands. After several extensions the complex now consists of five outdoor pools and an indoor pool. The venue was named after the Hungarian Olympic champion and architect in 1930. A bronze bust in the entrance hall reminds of Alfred Hajos, who died in 1955.

The most recent extensions are the 50m pool and the diving pool, built for the 2006 European Championships. The swimming pool was named after Tamas Szechy, one of the most successful swimming coaches in the world, who died in 2004. His swimmers achieved eight Olympic gold medals between 1980 and 1996.

First 2006 European medals in Open Water Swimming

Budapest (pps) The first medals of the 28th European Championships in Swimming, Diving, Synchronised Swimming and Open Water Swimming in Budapest will be awarded on Wednesday, when the women's 5km and the men's 10km events in Open Water Swimming in Lake Balaton will be decided.

The women will start their 5km race at 10:00 hrs. Medals will be awarded in this "short" long distance event that has been on the programme of the European Championships since 1989, for the tenth time. Up to now, seven different swimmers have won gold medals in this event. There will be definitely an eighth champion in Budapest as none of the former European champions is going to compete in Lake Balaton.

The only swimmer to achieve more than one title in the 5km has been Germany's Peggy Buchse. She won three successive European titles between 1997 and 2000. Russia's 2004 and 2005 World champion Larisa Ilchenko is the favourite for the European gold medal.

The men's 10km event has been on the European Championship programme only since Berlin in 2002, when Russia took gold and silver through Vladimir Diatchine and Evgueni Kochkarov, who then won the 2004 title in Madrid. The 24-year-old sports student is again considered the top favourite in Lake Balaton.

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LEN Opening Press Conference

More than 1,000 athletes at European Swimming Championships

Budapest (pps) At the Opening Press Conference of the 28th European Swimming Championships on Tuesday, LEN President Bartolo Consolo thanked Hungary's Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany and the Hungarian Swimming Association, headed by President Tamas Gyarmas (also a LEN Bureau member), that the Championships could take place in Budapest. Consolo in his welcome speech: "The importance of aquatics sports has been increasing year by year. " Proof of this being that approximately 700 media accreditations (including TV technicians) are present for this particular event.

LEN Secretary Sven Egil Folvik called it, "the largest swimming event in the world this year". A total of 1,008 athletes from 40 of the altogether 50 LEN member Federations have entered – 602 swimmers, 115 divers, 152 synchronised swimmers and 139 open water swimmers. Folvik reminded of the return of the Championships to Budapest after 80 years. "The inaugural European Swimming Championships were hosted by Budapest in 1926 – just for men, however. Women were admitted the following year in Bologna. Actually, LEN was officially founded in 1927".

Folvik further announced that LEN signed a partnership contract with the "Special Olympics" (organisation for the mentally handicapped). Two races for Hungarian mentally handicapped swimmers will be carried out at 16:45 hrs on 1st August prior to the swimming finals.

The Tamas Szechy swimming pool within the Alfred Hajos Complex has a total capacity of 8,000, the diving pool of 1,500 spectators; Tamas Gyarmas, the President of the Organising Committee, disclosed at the Opening Press Conference.

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European short course champion now in open water swimming

Balatonalmadi (pps) The admission of the 10km open water swimming event to the 2008 Olympic programme in Beijing appears to be very attractive to pool swimmers. Thus the 1999 European 1,500m short course champion and 2000 bronze medallist Igor Chervinskiy of the Ukraine will compete in the 10km open water at the 2006 European Championships in Lake Balaton. Chervinskiy also achieved bronze and silver at the 2002 and 2004 European long course championships. He has entered the 5km and 10km this year.

Jana Pechanova: Medals in pool and open water swimming

Balatonalmadi (pps) Jana Pechanova is a highly decorated swimmer in the 25m pool and in open water swimming. The Czech won European silver in the 400m and bronze in the 800m freestyle at the 2000 short course championships in Valencia as well as the 2003 World silver medal in the 5km plus 2004 World silver in the 10km. She will compete in the 5km and 10km at the 2006 Europeans in Lake Balaton.

Comeback after baby-break

Balatonalmadi (pps) 36-year-old Hungarian Rita Kovacs returns to the open water swimming competition this year after a break of almost ten years. The reason for her return is the admission of the 10km to the 2008 Olympic programme in Beijing. Rita Kovacs won her first European bronze medal in the 25km back in 1991 at Terracina, Italy, followed by World silver (25km) in Rome in 1994. She gained her first European title in the 5km in Vienna, Austria, in 1995. Kovacs retired from her career after winning European gold in the 25km and bronze in the 5km in Seville, Spain, in 1997. Rita Kovacs has a six-year-old son and will compete in the 10km and 25km at the 2006 Europeans in Lake Balaton.

German Angela Maurer also took a baby-break last year giving birth to a son. She is considered one of the favourites in the 10km and 25km in Lake Balaton. Maurer first made the podium at the 1999 European Championships in Istanbul winning silver in the 25km, and most recently gained the 2004 European bronze medal in the 10km. Her medal collection also includes two World silver and four bronze medals.