

SYNCHRO SWIMMERS RAISE STANDARDS

There couldn't have been a more beautiful setting for the World Masters Synchro Championships, with the two temporary pools built over the ice rink in Budapest's Városliget Park - just a stone's throw from Heroes' Square - and the impressive Vajdahunyad Castle creating the perfect backdrop. The sun was shining (most of the time), with temperatures soaring to 37 degrees, although they had to evacuate the training pool one evening due to thunder and lightning, and the technical solos in the higher age groups had to put on their best smiles the next morning despite the rain.

The surrounds of the warm-up pool provided a great opportunity for a catch-up with old friends both from home and abroad, and there was a great feeling of support from the GB clubs, who became allies for the week, rather than rivals. Special mention must go to the supporters: friends, family, partners, husbands and wives were there, waving flags and shouting encouragement. There was plenty of support from home too, with those who couldn't be there in person closely following the live stream.

'It can safely be said that every British swimmer stepped up their game on this international stage'

The first medal went to Jeanne Ansley of City of Leeds, a former GB squad swimmer, who was third in the 70-79 solo. Other top 10 solo placings included Reading Royals' Sally Robinson and Rushmoor's Andrea Holland who placed seventh and 10th in the 50-59 age group, along with Seymour's Yixin Yeng, who pulled up four places to finish seventh in the 25-29 years category.

The duet saw Brighton Dolphins' Margaret Hamerton and Liz Fitzsimons finish sixth in the 60-69 age group, with Rushmoor's pairing of Andrea Holland and Carolyn Wilson winning the bronze medal in the 50-59 group, swimming the same duet that earned them fourth place in the 1979 World Cup 38 years ago. Rachel Davies and Grace Reukers then equalled their placing in the 40-49 category, by pulling up from fourth into third to secure a second bronze for Rushmoor.

For the first time at the world masters, there was also a mixed duet event. Seymour's Yixin Zeng joined forces with Derde Exposito as GB's only mixed duet entry and fought hard to bring home the silver in the 30-39 age group. The support from the crowd for all of the mixed duet athletes was incredible, as everyone came together to celebrate this new event.

In the hotly contested free team event, GB was represented by two clubs, who both

earned a place in the medal ceremony. Rushmoor placed fifth in the 35-49 category, while Seymour improved on their seventh placing from the technical team to secure a sixth place medal in the 25-34 age group and an eighth placing ranking overall.

Seymour also placed ninth in the 25-39 category, ahead of Kingston Ladies who finished in 13th; while in the 40-64 age group, Rushmoor once again came fifth followed by Rugby who took 10th position.

For those who competed in every event, it was a tough week, with seven days of competition, training and walk-throughs - a huge change from doing all seven events in just one or two days but equally as challenging, with its constant highs and lows, build-ups and come-downs. Competing in an outdoor pool both in the sun and the rain brought with it new challenges, from soggy sandwiches and drenched clothing to sunburnt feet and squinty smiles.

Many teams started preparing for this event after the Euros in London last year and for the majority of GB swimmers, it was their first time competing at world championship level.

It mustn't be forgotten that most of these swimmers have full-time jobs, husbands, wives and children - and to have found the time to commit to them all is an achievement in itself.

British referee Jenny Gray commented on the continually rising standards at masters level, and I think it can safely be said that every British swimmer stepped up their game on this international stage.

Other GB results:

Solos

- 60-69 - Margaret Hamerton, Brighton Dolphins, 14th
- 50-59 - Carolyn Wilson, Rushmoor, 15th
- 40-49 - Carla Sanders, Rushmoor, 15th
- 40-49 - Rachel Davies, Rushmoor, 16th
- 30-39 - Natasha Rukazenkova-Cleverly, Seymour, 14th
- 30-39 - Elizabeth Winter, Seymour, 15th
- 25-29 - Giulia Escher, Seymour, 20th
- 25-29 - Rachael Stevens, Kingston Ladies, 27th

Duets

- 25-29 - Louise Chambers and Laura Gee, Kingston Ladies, 18th
- 30-39 - Elizabeth Winter and Natasha Rukazenkova-Cleverly, Seymour, 25th
- 50-59 - Anne Long and Linda Doidge, Brighton Dolphins, 11th

Elizabeth Winter



Top: Seymour with their free team medals, back: Alex Todd, Kendra Semple, Agata Jedrzychowska (coach), Elizabeth Winter, Natasha Rukazenkova-Cleverly. Front: Margaux Maupate, Hannah de Smet, Alisha Bance-Cuthbert, Yixin Zeng, Giulia Escher. Above: Seymour, Rushmoor and Kingston Ladies after the free combination team

WATER POLO

English Roses took a superb silver in the 45+ age group with a 12-8 win against Ireland's Donegall 35+ and a strong 11-1 win against Argentina's Medellin. Whilst the 30+ Roses team finished fourth.

London Polytechnic finished a creditable eighth out of 16 teams in the men's 50+ event in their first outing on the FINA World Masters stage in 17 years. They got stuck in with an 8-8 draw against Hungary's Sunday Boys, followed by a defeat to Sao Paulo.

A victory over Scottstown USA saw them face and beat Argentinian Pampas 10-4 in the quarter-final. But the Hungarian Happy Hippos proved themselves as strong as their namesakes, winning 7-2. Defeat followed, first from Rio and then from Sao Paulo by just one goal, to put them in the eighth spot.