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ASWS #1 Virtual USA Day 2: Host USA Wins Four Gold Medals

Maureen Croes, FINA Media Committee Member

It was another trip around the world for viewers sitting in the comfort of their own homes, visiting the home pools of the twelve countries participating on day two of the first leg of the FINA Artistic Swimming World Series hosted virtually by the United States.

On Sunday, all Free routines were contested. In general, Free routines allow the athletes to showcase creativity in the choreography while also highlighting their unique strengths and abilities throughout the routines. It allows for freedom in the artistic impression and artistic exploration and allows more lifts.

Up first was the Free Duet event. The Gold medal winners in the Technical Duet, USA's Lindi Schroeder and Anita Álvarez, added another gold to their collection with 84.9333 points. The routine, choreographed on music chosen by their Coach Andrea Fuentes, showcased their creativity and flexibility and was only swum once before for their bronze-winning performance at the 2020 ASWS in Paris, France.



Anita Alvarez (USA) ©Getty Images

Today's silver medal was won by the duet of Vera Butsel and Hanna Koutson representing Belarus with a score of 81.7000.

Butsel and Koutson's routine, themed "*Space Wars for the Universe*" and swum to electronic music, showcased a

choreography that included many interesting angles that increased the difficulty of the routine. The bronze medal was won by the very energetic duet from Colombia, Estefania Alvarez Piedrahita and Monica Arango Estrada. Alvarez and Arango scored 79.2667 for their performance on fast-paced Salsa music, a tribute to the importance of Salsa music in the Colombian culture. The pair's energy and ability to keep up with the fast pace from the very beginning to the end of the routine was a clear indication that Salsa is part of their soul.

"We accepted the challenge of competing in the US Open with great courage and being aware of the difficulties we had experienced during 2020 and at the beginning of 2021. We are filled with tranquility and satisfaction knowing that we were able to compete and show our new routines even with those adversities. Few countries took up the challenge and we are very proud to know that this is a good first step towards qualifying for the Olympics, we have more time to continue working, improve every detail and thus achieve our goal."



Estefania Alvarez Piedrahita and Monica Arango Estrada (COL) ©Getty Images

Next was the Mixed Duet event, which today featured two duets, both hailing from Spain. First up was the younger duet,

Maria Bofill Strub and Dennis Gonzalez Boneu, performing their routine based upon the movie “*Angels and Demons*” to

music by Hans Zimmer. The pair, silver medalists at the 2019 Youth World Championships, performed a routine that is only one month old. Even so, their performance which scored 77.9000, and showed great promise for their future at the Senior level. After winning a gold medal yesterday in the Technical Mixed Duet, Emma Garcia and Pau Ribes scored 82.2000 and another gold medal. This new routine, choreographed to music from the musical “*Cats*”, showcased their athleticism and strength in the lifts with great heights.



Emma Garcia and Pau Ribes (ESP) ©Getty Images

“We are so happy with the performance we swum. The first hybrid, especially, we are so proud of it.”

The Solo events were next on the program. Drawing number-one Olympian Jaqueline Simoneau (CAN) scored 90.1000 to win the gold medal and proved that she is worthy of all the ASWS medals she has collected over the years as a soloist. This

new routine swum to music written by Michael Berger from a Canadian Rock Opera is another example of the artistry of Simoneau, who uses the music and choreography to draw you into her performances.



Jacqueline Simoneau (CAN) ©Getty Images

“The virtual event is really cool to watch, it’s really engaging and neat how the whole competition has been put together, you can see that there is a lot of effort behind it all. It’s really neat to see everyone compete and to stay connected virtually.”

Solo events allow individual athletes more freedom of expression as they provide an opportunity for the soloists to spread a

message or idea that is important to them. Anita Alvarez (USA)’s silver medal performance, “*Confessions*”, came from deep

within her soul as she shared her message reflecting “*how to love what you do*” and “*how to empower yourself*”. Swimming to the song by Jessie J, Alvarez scored 87.1333 as she made her debut as the soloist for the USA on the world stage.

Belarus's soloist Vera Butsel scored a solid 82.8000 for her routine to win the bronze medal.

The next event, the Male Free Solo, marks another first during this first-ever virtual ASWS. It is only fitting that the gold medal was won by trailblazer, role model, and advocate for male inclusion in the sport, Bill May (USA). Swimming to music by Billy Alsbrook, Bill's interpretation of his message "to follow your heart and never give up in what you believe in" was awarded 86.7333 points.



Bill May (USA) ©Getty Images

"This solo is very special to me and it followed the decisions made about male inclusion and lowering of numbers of female

athletes in the Olympics. This was an opportunity for myself to say, we are disappointed, we are upset about this, but we

stand as one, we will rise above this, we will fight for this. This gave me an opportunity to stand up for what I believe. This

”

The silver medal went to Spain's Junior superstars, young and upcoming Dennis Gonzalez Boneu who scored 78.1333 while

swimming to the song "*It's a man's world*", also referring to the fight for the inclusion of male athletes to the Artistic

Swimming events.

The last three events on the program were the team events, which unfortunately, as is also the case in live ASWS, did not have many entries. Traveling with the number of athletes necessary for a Team, Combo or Highlight event can be very costly and hamper participation. However, this new opportunity, a virtual Competition, could be the solution to increase participation, and hopefully that will be the case with the next virtual leg of the ASWS.

In the Free Team event, Team USA performed their "Robot" routine to earn 87.5667 points for the gold medal. The idea behind the theme and music of this routine, the interest and love of the Japanese for robots and robotic music, is a hint towards USA's goals to qualify for the Tokyo Olympics.

The Combo event was won by Spain's routine "*Fun Machine*" with a score of 85.3667. This group of Junior athletes, that

has won a silver medal at the Junior European Championships, is in preparation for the Junior World Championships later this year. Second place went to the Combo routine from Aruba. This entry, Aruba's first ever participation in a FINA ASWS with a Team, is an example of the increased opportunities a virtual event can bring to all countries. The theme of their

routine "*Around the World*" also was a perfect fit for this virtual competition, where they very creatively incorporated music from 7 different areas of the world in their routine.

Finally, in the Highlight event, Team USA, which included a male swimmer for the first time, just outperformed the Team

from Spain with an 85.9000 to win the gold medal. Spain's routine "*Namaste*" swum to Hindu music scored 85.6000 for the silver medal.

As is the case with the live events, this ASWS closed with a Gala event. Hopefully, after watching the very creative routine from Australia's Zoe Poulis, showing mermaid-like beauty, grace, and athleticism all at once, there will be more countries submitting entries in the Gala event at the next virtual ASWS. FINA technical Artistic Swimming Committee Chair Lisa Schott (CAN) proudly summed up this groundbreaking weekend in the world of Artistic Swimming:

“United States Artistic Swimming has set the bar high for the next Artistic Swimming World Series Virtual Competition. They were brave pioneers in stepping up and leading the sport in this virtual platform. We are Extremely proud of the way the artistic swimming community continues to work together to find new ways to motivate our athletes.”

The points awarded to this ASWS will count towards the ASWS series and participation in the Super Final of the AWSW scheduled for June 11 through 13, 2021 in Barcelona, Spain.

The scores for the countries in the ASWS are:

USA - UNITED STATES 295
ESP - SPAIN 210
BLR - BELARUS 160
ARU - ARUBA 80
SWE - SWEDEN 71
CAN - CANADA 50
COL - COLOMBIA 50
LIE - LIECHTENSTEIN 50
SMR - SAN MARINO 34
POR - PORTUGAL 15
AUS - AUSTRALIA 14
