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Florent Manaudou is in a new role: "Hungarian spectators are amazing"

2017.07.30. 14:22 CET

Florent Manaudou, Olympic, world and European champion swimmer, one of the most renowned specialists of men's 50m freestyle has debuted at the 17th FINA World Championships in Budapest in a totally different role. At the invitation of the French national TV channel he arrived in Budapest as a specialist commentator and observed his fellows competing from TV grandstands. After claiming silver in Rio the French sprinted announced to suspend his career temporarily and since last September he has been a member of Aix-en-Provence handball team. In Budapest he returned to swimming, but only in theory and just for a few days.

How do you like this new role?

First of all I am really happy to be here at the World Championships. I stopped swimming last summer and it feels great to work here, see my fellow swimmers again, with whom I was racing together not so long ago. It was fantastic to follow and commentate my friends, Camille and Jeremy's performance (Camille Lacourt and Jeremy Stravius - entrants in men's 50m backstroke). However, I must admit it feels a bit weird to sit on the opposite side, outside the pool where I always used to play.



With another legend, Mark Spitz (Photo: Facebook/Florent Manaudou)

Have you tried the pool?

I have. Thanks to my new role I had the opportunity to enter the media relay. What is more, in the French media relay team I swam together with the greatest idol of my childhood, Xavier Marchand. I was 8 when in 1998 he claimed silver in 200m medley at the Perth World Championships. It was the greatest privilege for me. I liked the pool a lot, I think it is really fast, but since I am not into regular training any more, I cannot evaluate it in details. The outstanding results achieved this week speak for themselves and confirm my view. The atmosphere generated by Hungarian fans is truly amazing.

Don't you feel inspired to return to swimming now?

As a matter of fact the sole reason I would resume swimming is if Paris was granted the right to host the 2024 Olympics. Entering the Games in front of a home crowd is more than appealing. Becoming an Olympic champion in Paris is a source of motivation I would seriously consider. As of now, however, it is not an issue. We shall see in 2-3 years.

How is handball going?

It is going really well; I find a lot of joy in handball. As a child I always wanted to become a handball player, like my father, and in the beginning I did both disciplines simultaneously. It is a team sport, totally different from swimming in this respect, I enjoy it a great deal. Why did I become a swimmer after all? In handball one shall get into a very good team relatively early. Even if you are talented, it may happen that your talent remains unnoticed. Swimming

is completely different. It all comes down to me and the stop watch. Victory is totally obvious, it cannot be questioned. I guess this is why I went for swimming. It was a good decision. Changing now was a good decision, as well. Throughout the years swimming became my work, my profession. Handball is much more like entertainment for me, that is why I find more joy in it than I could ever have in swimming

What do you expect from your friends, Camille and Jeremy in men's 50m backstroke final?

Don't tell anyone but I hope for two medals for France, yet I know it will be a rather tough race. Camille Lacourt has the potential for gold, but we will see, it will be a very close 50m.