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Synchro: Fascinating Italian dynamics

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Italy is one of the most defying nations in European synchronised swimming, holding undeniable merits in popularising and developing the discipline on the Old Continent. The Italians will surely bring a special, Mediterranean edge to the 17th FINA World Championships' synchronised swimming competitions this July.

The discipline's greatest pioneer in Italy, Romilde Cucchetti decided to mix her long years of experience in professional swimming coaching with some lighter, more aesthetic movements back in 1972. She put rhythm changes in swimming, introduced new forms of choreographies and created new arm exercises to complement the focus on legs.

Her new method gained unprecedented success among swimmer girls who were finally able to break the monotony of swimming from wall to wall. Enthusiasm soon spread and more coaches and athletes started to study - then teach - the basics of synchronised swimming. Italy's greatest aquatic athletes of the era joined the discipline, such as diver Bruna Rossi or Stefania Tudini, who built up an extraordinary synchro career as an athlete. Following her professional years, 'Cicci' has been nurturing Italian and international synchro as a sports diplomat, becoming Chairwoman of the FINA Technical Synchronised Swimming Committee.

The glorious past obliges the present athletes to keep up with the traditions. 2016 brought the success that was not seen since the Athens Olympics: Italian synchronised swimmers qualified to two events of the Rio Games.

The Olympic qualification system became much stricter in 2008 (the number of participating teams were decreased from 12 to 8), that it was almost impossible for Italians to earn the berth against the very strong European rivals, Russia, Spain or Ukraine. The, the pre-Olympic qualification event in 2016 proved that the points-based evaluation system can bring great surprises: ahead of Spain (90.033) and Canada (91.9) the Italians made it to the best eight teams of the world, therefore qualified to the Olympic Games. *'It has been proven fortunately that results are not always as predicted even in synchro'* - Stefania Tudini commented on the achievement.



Photo: kazan2015.com

Italians almost 'shocked' the synchronised swimming society, as just a month before the qualification event they were a full point behind the Spanish team in the Free Event. Their secret of success was the experienced roster of athletes. Their routine was somewhat altered following the World Championships in Kazan, becoming even more unique and dynamic, directed by three-time Olympian Giovanna Burlando and Russian Olympic champion Anastasia Ermakova.

The Italian team finally finished fifth in Rio de Janeiro, delivering the best ever Olympic performance in the event, while Linda Cerutti and Constanza Ferro finished on the sixth place, directly behind the Spanish duet. They performed to the evergreen hit 'Sweet Dreams' by Eurythmics, bringing an amazing atmosphere and making the audience go wild.

2017 sees a brand new routine by the Italians, filled with artistic features, representing the Russian paradigms with a number of ballet elements. This time a more classical music tune was selected to accompany the choreography.

Italy has not yet delivered a great number of medals over the past FINA World Championships, but they have an outstanding tally of European podium places in all events. The only athlete who has won a World medal for Italian synchro so far is Beatrice Adelizzi who won a bronze medal in Rome in 2009.

Two more World medals were added however in Kazan as the mixed events were included in

the competition programme for the first time: Giorgio Minsini and Mariangela Perrupato clinched the third place in the mixed free event, while Manila Flamini and Giorgio Minsini won another bronze medal in the technical event.