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The World Championships of novelties: Dávid Szántó sport director goes for teamwork

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Budapest and Hungary are preparing for a historic event. Hosting the 17th FINA World Championships marks the beginning of a new era not only for swimmers but for those engaged in other disciplines, as well. Hungary has never organised such a significant sporting event attracting the attention of people from five continents. It is no exaggeration to say that for a bit more than two weeks the eyes of the world will be on us.

Thousands of athletes from hundreds of countries will come together in Budapest and Balatonfüred between 14 and 30 July. We have completed gigantic developments, investments and reconstructions and everyone is awaiting the opening ceremony -promising to be exceptional- with great excitement. It is quite obvious even for an outsider that tremendous work is required to deliver such a project. Who is the person keeping control of all minute details of the work being done? Is it the director? Of course, it is. Due to the nature of the event we'd rather call him sports director. His name is Dávid Szántó.



There is no need to introduce him to sport enthusiasts, as a tv commentator he appears in the living room of viewers on a regular basis. This time, however, he took up a totally different role. Who is Dávid Szántó really?

Currently I am working as a sports director. Otherwise I am a sports reporter. I love my profession therefore after conducting the World Championships successfully (it will definitely be successful since efforts and aspirations of a number of people are interwoven in this undertaking) I will be glad to continue where I paused for the sake of the World Championships. After all, this one-of-a-kind challenge found me thanks to my profession, also. I have taken part in numerous sporting events as a reporter, I have gained positive and negative experience alike which come really handy now working as the sports director.

The position sounds great, but what does it involve in practice?

Basically everything. As a matter of fact, I am in charge of organising all tournaments thus all issues are somewhat linked to me: I am required to have an insight into all matters from establishing venues through the transportation and accommodation of athletes to marketing and media.

Coordinating such a huge event must be a complex task...

It is, but I am only a cog in the machine. Since competitions will be held in six disciplines it

is like organising six World Championships hence I needed six teams. Cooperation between the teams was vital and so far it has been smooth. It was me who appointed these units and the guiding principle in choosing them was professional experience. Fortunately, there are several professionals in Hungary with extensive experience. Although we have not yet hosted such a large scale sporting event, Hungary has conducted countless high level sporting events successfully so far. I aimed at relying on such experience and I believe I managed to do so. Thanks to the World Championships these professionals can now move on to a higher level.

What is new about the World Championships this time compared to previous ones?

Since there is an abundance of novelties it is hard to pick but a few. All disciplines will feature unprecedented happenings, not to mention the opening ceremony which is going to be a big hit. Regarding venues, it is probably that of synchronised swimming which I am most proud of. The venue has been established in a picturesque setting involving the City Park. It opens up brand new perspectives for the discipline and may create a precedent that tournaments could be staged in the most beautiful sites of the city. At the same time this way we managed to come up with a solution to avoid interference between diving and synchronised swimming events.

The venue for high diving is not an ordinary one either.

For sure not. We pursued a similar approach when picking the amazing Parliament building as the background for the event. High diving is a spectacular show anyway but this will be the first time divers jump in a temporary mobile pool, one of the peculiarities of this venue.

Open water swimming events will take place in Balatonfüred. Isn't it a bit too far?

Balaton can definitely not be missed from an aquatic tournament. What is more, all the conditions were present in Füred to deliver the developments we had planned. It is hard to follow these events, that is the major difficulty about them. We had an idea and built the grandstands on the surface of the water. We have established time gates and giant screens along the entire course while spectators will be sitting almost on the surface of water in the middle of the happenings. It is impossible to bring spectators any closer to the race than this at such an event.

What is special about Duna Arena?

Virtually a swimming palace has been constructed for the sake of the World Championships. It has been built for this event specifically to host swimming and diving event. I guess there is no need to elaborate it more, it goes without saying that the facility fulfils its functions perfectly.



Water polo will be staged on Margaret Island. Will multiple venues lead to confusion?

In fact, there are many different venues, but not too many to control. It is quite typical when hosting such a gigantic event. Budapest has great geographic location, we will make best use of the Danube transport-wise which will further enhance the level of the World Championships. There was no question that water polo matches would take place in Hajós. It was obvious not only for us. Those involved in water polo, whether they are Hungarian, Italian, Spanish, American, etc. all know that this pool is where it all began. This is the cradle of the discipline. Such a legendary place which deserves to host a World Championships final. Two finals, to be precise.

What was the biggest challenge?

Time, definitely. Originally we were to host the event in 2021 only, but we decided to undertake this task now so all throughout the preparation period we were racing against time. We have won. I hope so. Of course this amazing team was vital in doing so, and it was a pleasure to work together. Everyone did their job correctly and conscientiously. I could clearly see harmony and partnership in collaboration and cooperation. No matter whom we asked for help or cooperation they were at our service at all times. This way it is not that hard to be a sports director...

Only a couple of seconds and the World Championships kick off. Is everything ready for the start?

I can tell you, it is. In the beginning minor disruptions may occur therefore I kindly recommend spectators to arrive at the competitions in time. I ask for understanding and

patience, for more than two years we have been working hard to ensure that those attending the event would enjoy it and return home with once-in-a-lifetime experience.

With Hungarian successes?

Definitely!