



Russia's Anastasia Davydova and Anastasia Ermakova perform during their gold medal win at the world swimming championships in 2007. Davydova will only compete in the team event at the London Olympics, while Ermakova has retired. A new generation is expected to continue Russia's domination of the sport.

MARK BAKER / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Russia's synchro in perfect rhythm

By AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Russia's water queens are set to continue their domination of synchronized swimming again at the London Games, having swept all the gold medals at the Olympics over the last 12 years.

Russia won both the duet and team golds at the Sydney, Athens and Beijing games and show no signs of releasing their stranglehold on the sport famous for its glittering make-up and sequined costumes.

Russia's Anastasia Davydova is a name to look out for as the 29-year-old bids to win her fifth straight gold after winning both the team and duet titles, alongside partner Anastasia Ermakova, at Athens and Beijing.

Having posed with Ermakova for the Russian edition of popular men's magazine Maxim sporting an impressive collection of butterfly tattoos down her back, Davydova will compete this time only in the team event.

Ermakova has retired, but the next generation are already busy collecting medals through world duet champions Natalia Ishchenko and Svetlana Romashina.

The pair won the technical and free routine gold medals at the 2011 world championships in Shanghai.

Ishchenko added the solo technical, solo free and free routine combination titles in a five-gold medal haul.

The 26-year-old has already claimed 15 gold medals at world championships since 2005 and is likely to add to

the single Olympic gold she claimed for the team event at Beijing.

The Russians won all seven synchronized swimming gold medals at last year's world championships, and Davydova explained how they have set the standard in the sport, which has been on the Olympic program since 1984.

"Thorough work was done before the results appeared from 1998 onwards," she said. "When the medals started to come, it was easier to find new talents and attract them to this discipline.

"Russian synchronized swimmers increased the speed of the routines, this was imitated by the other countries and that is why the discipline has evolved to this demanding and complex level."

As they have been for the last three Olympics, two gold medals are up for

grabs in London in the team and duet events.

Australia, Canada, China, hosts Great Britain, Egypt, Japan, Spain and, of course, Russia have all qualified for the eight-strong team event.

Every detail of the routine is judged, and swimmers must be perfectly synchronized to score highly.

Featuring such terms as the back layout, a position where the swimmer holds herself flat on the surface, and the eggbeater, when they tread water, the sport demands lungs of steel and perfect timing.

Underwater speakers help the swimmers keep time to the music, and nose clips allow them to stay underwater for longer, but the sport still requires tremendous breath control.

First day of water polo will feel a lot like final

By AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Confident Serbia expects to dent Hungary's bid for a fourth straight Olympic water polo title when the sport's superpowers meet on the first day of the men's competition in London.

Serbia, the European champion, is chasing the only major honor to elude it since the republic's establishment in 2006, while its mighty Hungarian neighbors already have nine Olympic golds.

The two countries are supreme in world water polo with a combined six world championships and 12 Olympic gold medals between them, including Serbia's three Olympic titles won as the former Yugoslavia.

Their record makes for a spicy first day of competition in London when they meet in their opening round-robin game.

"This generation has won gold at the European and world championships, and is only missing a triumph at the Olympics," Serb star Slobodan Nikic said.

"I think we deserve to win the gold and have shown we are the best in the

world right now, even though we lost (8-7) to the Italians in Shanghai."

Hungary, which downed the US 14-10 in the Beijing final, has extraordinary success at the Olympics and has missed out on a medal only five times.

Under national team coach Dejan Udovicic since 2006, Serbia has won two golds at the European championships (Belgrade 2006 and Eindhoven 2012), one silver (Malaga 2008) and one bronze (Zagreb 2010).

The Serbs also won the world championship in Rome in 2009 and were silver medalists in Shanghai last year.

As well as Yugoslavia's three Olympic titles in 1968, 1984 and 1988, Serbia also claimed a bronze at the 2008 Beijing Games.

Reigning world champion Italy is separated from Hungary and Serbia in Group A and the "Settebello" will have to contend with Spain and Croatia to get through to the medal rounds.

With two groups of six making up the draw, the four highest-ranked teams in each group will qualify for the quarterfinals.

In the women's competition, Italy downed world champion Greece to win



STEVE HOLLAND / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Slobodan Nikic (center) of Serbia is charged by Fabio Bencivenga (right) of Italy at the 2007 world swimming championships. Nikic will lead Serbia at the London Games. "This generation has won gold at the European and world championships, and is only missing a triumph at the Olympics," Nikic said.

its fifth European title in Eindhoven in January, and it is in strong contention for the gold medal. Italy, which won the women's tournament at Athens 2004, will face stiff competition from 2000 winners Australia, Hungary and three-time Olympic medalist the US.

"I think this Australian team is a lot stronger than the one in 2008 as we have a lot more outside shooters," said Bronwen Knox, a member of Australia's bronze medal-winning team in Beijing. "That's only going to help us even more when it comes to the crunch in London."

SWIMMING MEDAL PROJECTIONS

• MEN

50 freestyle

Gold: Cesar Cielo, Brazil
Silver: James Magnussen, Australia

Bronze: Frederick Bousquet, France

100 freestyle

Gold: James Magnussen, Australia

Silver: Yannick Angel, France

Bronze: Nikita Lobintsev, Russia

200 freestyle

Gold: Ryan Lochte, United States

Silver: Yannick Angel, France

Bronze: Park Tae-hwan, South Korea

400 freestyle

Gold: Sun Yang, China

Silver: Park Tae-hwan, South Korea

Bronze: Yannick Angel, France

1,500 freestyle

Gold: Sun Yang, China

Silver: Park Tae-hwan, South Korea

Bronze: Gregorio Paltrinieri, Italy

100 backstroke

Gold: Matt Grevers, United States

Silver: Ryosuke Irie, Japan

Bronze: Camille Lacourt, France

200 backstroke

Gold: Ryan Lochte, United States

Silver: Ryosuke Irie, Japan

Bronze: Tyler Clary, United States

100 breaststroke

Gold: Kosuke Kitajima, Japan

Silver: Felipe Franca da Silva, Brazil

Bronze: Brendan Hansen, United States

200 breaststroke

Gold: Kosuke Kitajima, Japan

Silver: Ryo Tateishi, Japan

Bronze: Daniel Gyurta, Hungary

100 butterfly

Gold: Michael Phelps, United States

Silver: Tyler McGill, United States

Bronze: Milorad Cavic, Serbia

200 butterfly

Gold: Michael Phelps, United States

Silver: Takeshi Matsuda, Japan

Bronze: Nick D'Arcy, Australia

200 individual medley

Gold: Michael Phelps, United States

Silver: Ryan Lochte, United States

Bronze: Laszlo Cseh, Hungary

400 individual medley

Gold: Ryan Lochte, United States

Silver: Michael Phelps, United States

Bronze: Kosuke Hagino, Japan

4x100 freestyle relay

Gold: Australia

Silver: United States

Bronze: France

Gold: United States

Silver: Germany

Bronze: Italy

Gold: United States

Silver: Italy

Bronze: Australia

10k open water

Gold: Spyridon Gianniotis, Greece

Silver: Thomas Lurz, Germany

Bronze: Evgeny Drattsev, Russia

• WOMEN

50 freestyle

Gold: Ranomi Kromowidjojo, Netherlands

Silver: Francesca Halsall, Britain

Bronze: Marleen Veldhuis, Netherlands

100 freestyle

Gold: Ranomi Kromowidjojo, Netherlands

Silver: Sarah Sjöström, Sweden

Bronze: Francesca Halsall, Britain

200 freestyle

Gold: Allison Schmitt, United States

Silver: Camille Muffat, France

Bronze: Federica Pellegrini, Italy

400 freestyle

Gold: Rebecca Adlington, Britain

Silver: Camille Muffat, France

Bronze: Allison Schmitt, United States

800 freestyle

Gold: Rebecca Adlington, Britain

Silver: Lotte Friis, Denmark

Bronze: Xin Xin, China

100 backstroke

Gold: Missy Franklin, United States

Silver: Zhao Qing, China

Bronze: Anastasia Zueva, Russia

200 backstroke

Gold: Missy Franklin, United States

Silver: Belinda Hocking, Australia

Bronze: Anastasia Zueva, Russia

100 breaststroke

Gold: Rebecca Soni, United States

Silver: Leiston Pickett, Australia

Bronze: Breeja Larson, United States

200 breaststroke

Gold: Rebecca Soni, United States

Silver: Satomi Suzuki, Japan

Bronze: Kanako Watanabe, Japan

100 butterfly

Gold: Dana Vollmer, United States

Silver: Sarah Sjöström, Sweden

Bronze: Ellen Gandy, Britain

200 butterfly

Gold: Jiao Liuyang, China

Silver: Natsumi Hoshi, Japan

Bronze: Ellen Gandy, Britain

200 individual medley

Gold: Stephanie Rice, Australia

Silver: Ye Shiwen, China

Bronze: Caitlin Leverenz, United States

400 individual medley

Gold: Elizabeth Beisel, United States

Silver: Hannah Miley, Britain

Bronze: Katinka Hosszu, Hungary

400 freestyle relay

Gold: Netherlands

Silver: United States

Bronze: Australia

Gold: Australia

Silver: United States

Bronze: China

Gold: United States

Silver: Australia

Bronze: Russia

10k open water

Gold: Ana Marcela Cunha, Brazil

Silver: Angela Maurer, Germany

Bronze: Martina Grimaldi, Italy

SYNCHRONIZED SWIMMING MEDAL PROJECTIONS

• DUET

Gold: Russia (Natalia Ishchenko and Svetlana Romashina)

Silver: China (Huang Xuechen and Liu Ou)

Bronze: Spain (Ona Carbonell and Andrea Fuentes)

and Andrea Fuentes)

• TEAM

Gold: Russia

Silver: China

Bronze: Spain

WATER POLO MEDAL PROJECTIONS

• MEN

Gold: Serbia

Silver: Croatia

Bronze: Hungary

• WOMEN

Gold: United States

Silver: Australia

Bronze: Spain