



Simone Ruffini powers his way to the gold medal in the men's 10km open water swimming race on Saturday.

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BAY'S WARM WATERS NO SWEAT FOR THE ITALIAN CHAMPION

SWIMMER SNAGS GAMES' FIRST GOLD BY ALMOST TWO MINUTES, DESPITE TRAINING IN CHILLIER LAKES

By SUN XIAOCHEN
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SHENZHEN — Used to swimming in cold lakes in Europe, Italian student Simone Ruffini never imagined he would be hot enough to win a gold medal in the warm waters of Seven Star Bay in Shenzhen.

Ruffini was delighted to win the men's 10km open water race yesterday and so clinch the first gold medal to be decided at the Shenzhen Universiade.

"It was a wonderful race for me. A very surprising experience to swim here with so many people watching," Ruffini told a packed mixed zone after finishing the "marathon competition" in 1 hour, 58 minutes, and 0.7 seconds on Saturday morning.

Russian swimmer Kirill Abrosimov finished second in 2:00:0.3 ahead of Yasunari Hirai from Japan who finished 2 sec later.

An hour before the event started at 7 am, a huge crowd of reporters and photographers had already taken positions on Seven Star Bay, which is in a remote part of eastern Shenzhen.

Curiosity about who would win the Games' first gold medal drew unprecedented attention to the low-profile event.

However, Ruffini shrugged off the pressure, saying whether or not he won the first gold of the Games was no "big deal" for him.

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AFTER WINNING THE FIRST GOLD

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"My physical condition was not the best. I had to wake up so early

in the morning to meet the schedule, and the weather here is much hotter than in Italy.

"On the first lap, I had some problems but I got used to the conditions. I was aiming for the gold, and I did it," the 21-year-old said.

According to Giuseppe Palumbo, Ruffini's coach, the higher water temperature here might have hampered the swimmer, who usually practices and races in cold water.

Palumbo said his secret for handling the change in climate was to hold a pre-game camp for his athletes in Singapore so they could adapt to Asian weather.

Ruffini, who studies athletic training at the Scienze Motorie School in Urbino, a Mediterranean

coastal city in northern Italy, started swimming when he was 4 years old.

To prepare for the FINA Worlds and the Universiade, he trained six hours a day before doing another hour's body work in the gym.

Ruffini said he would try to make up for the study time he missed so that he could pursue his plan to become a coach.

Besides swimming, Ruffini's favorite sport is motorcycle racing, which is very popular in Urbino, the hometown of iconic motorcycle rider Valentino Rossi.

"He (Ruffini) is a big fan of everything related to motor racing and sports cars," Palumbo said. "Rossi is the brand of the city, and he likes him very much. But I don't let him ride a motorcycle. It's a little bit dangerous."