



# Press release

PR30-12

## 31<sup>st</sup> LEN European Swimming Championships – Debrecen 2012

### The countdown for the Olympics begins in Debrecen

Debrecen (pps) The Olympic Games in London are undoubtedly the highlight in swimming in 2012. But before London, the 31<sup>st</sup> LEN European Swimming Championships in Debrecen, Hungary, are on the programme. Some European Federations take the opportunity at the Europeans for another qualification for the Olympics, others make do without their top athletes to give them more time to prepare for London. However, the countdown begins in Debrecen.

The strongest and largest teams in Debrecen are Italy (49 swimmers), host Hungary (36), and Germany (35). LEN admits up to four athletes per nation in the heats, but only two swimmers per nation can make it into the semi-finals and finals.

The European Swimming Championships in Debrecen have a record entry of 570 swimmers from 44 of the 51 LEN Member Federations. At the last Europeans in Budapest 2010, 43 countries were represented, but then in swimming, diving, synchronised swimming, and open water swimming.

Debrecen stood in for Antwerp as venue at short notice; the divers and synchronised swimmers determine their 2012 European Champions in Eindhoven, Netherlands. Thus Hungary plays host to long course European Swimming Championships for the fifth time in history: Budapest organised the inaugural event in 1926, and then in 1958, 2006, and 2010. Debrecen was also the venue of the 2007 European Short Course Swimming Championships.

The programme of these long course European Championships is unchanged with 40 events for men and women.



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Three 2008 Olympic Champions with four titles will compete in Debrecen, Britta Steffen (GER) in the 50m and 100m freestyle, Federica Pellegrini (ITA) in the 200m freestyle, and Alain Bernard (FRA) 100m freestyle; also present will be three 2011 World Champions, Daniel Gyurta (HUN) 200m breaststroke, Jeremy Stravius (FRA) 100m backstroke, and Pellegrini (200m and 400m freestyle), and eight 2009 World Champions: Paul Biedermann (GER) 200m and 400m freestyle, Gyurta (200m breaststroke, Milorad Cavic (SRB) 50m butterfly, Steffen (50m and 100m freestyle), Pellegrini (200m and 400m freestyle), Nadja Higl (SRB) 200m breaststroke, Katinka Hosszu (HUN) 400m individual medley, and Sarah Sjoestroem (SWE) 100m butterfly. Twelve title holders from Budapest 2010 will try to retain their victories in the 34 individual competitions in Debrecen.

One Olympic Champion of the past is the oldest participant in Debrecen. At the age of 38, Sweden's Lars Froelander will swim the 100m freestyle and the 100m butterfly. He won Olympic gold in the 100m butterfly in Sydney 2000. He will celebrate his 38<sup>th</sup> birthday in Debrecen on 26 May. Slovakia's Martina Moravcova is two years younger. She is one of the most successful international swimmers in the past 20 years, and is now married and the mother of a two-year-old daughter, Karolina. After competing at five Olympic Games since 1992, she will return to the international stage in Debrecen in the 50m freestyle and 50m butterfly sprint events.

France topped the medal table in Budapest 2010 with 21 medals (8-7-6) followed by Russia (7-4-1), Great Britain (6-6-6), and Hungary (6-4-3).

The men's and women's freestyle sprints in the 50m and 100m will probably be among the highlights in Debrecen. France's 100m Olympic Champion Alain Bernard finished fifth in his national trials and consequently will not compete in the Olympic individual event, but will try to indemnify himself in the 50m and 100m freestyle in Debrecen against his compatriots Amaury Leveaux and Frederick Bousquet, current European title holder in the 50m, the fast Italians with two-time World Champion Filippo Magnini, Luca Dotto and Marco Orsi, as well as Sweden's several-time European short course Champion Stefan Nystrand. Bousquet (50m freestyle and 50m butterfly) failed to qualify for the Olympics, as did 2010 double European Champion Sebastien Rouault (800m and 1500m freestyle).



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Sweden's 2009 100m butterfly World Champion Sarah Sjoestroem will challenge Germany's 2008 double Olympic Champion Britta Steffen in the 100m freestyle. Sjoestroem currently holds second place in the 2012 World Rankings with 53.29 seconds, Steffen is fourth with 53.65sec. Just before London, Steffen will want to put the record straight in Debrecen after her failure in Shanghai, while butterfly specialist Sjoestroem has established herself firmly among the world's top freestylers in this Olympic season. She is also in second position in the 200m freestyle in 2012, but will not defend her title in the 100m butterfly in Debrecen.

2008 Olympic Champion (200 freestyle) Federica Pellegrini has also entered the 800m freestyle again in addition to the 200m and 400m. She took bronze two years ago in that event.

On home soil, Hungary will again attempt to top the medal table with its strong team: Laszlo Cseh (200m butterfly, 200/400m individual medleys), Daniel Gyurta (100/200m breaststroke), Gergo Kis (400/800/1500m freestyle), Bence Biczo (200m butterfly), Katinka Hosszu (200m butterfly, 200/400m individual medleys), Zsuzsanna Jakabos (200m butterfly, 200/400m individual medleys) and siblings David (200m backstroke and 200/400m individual medleys) and Evelyn Verraszto (200m freestyle and 200 m individual medley) have been reliable pillars for years.

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