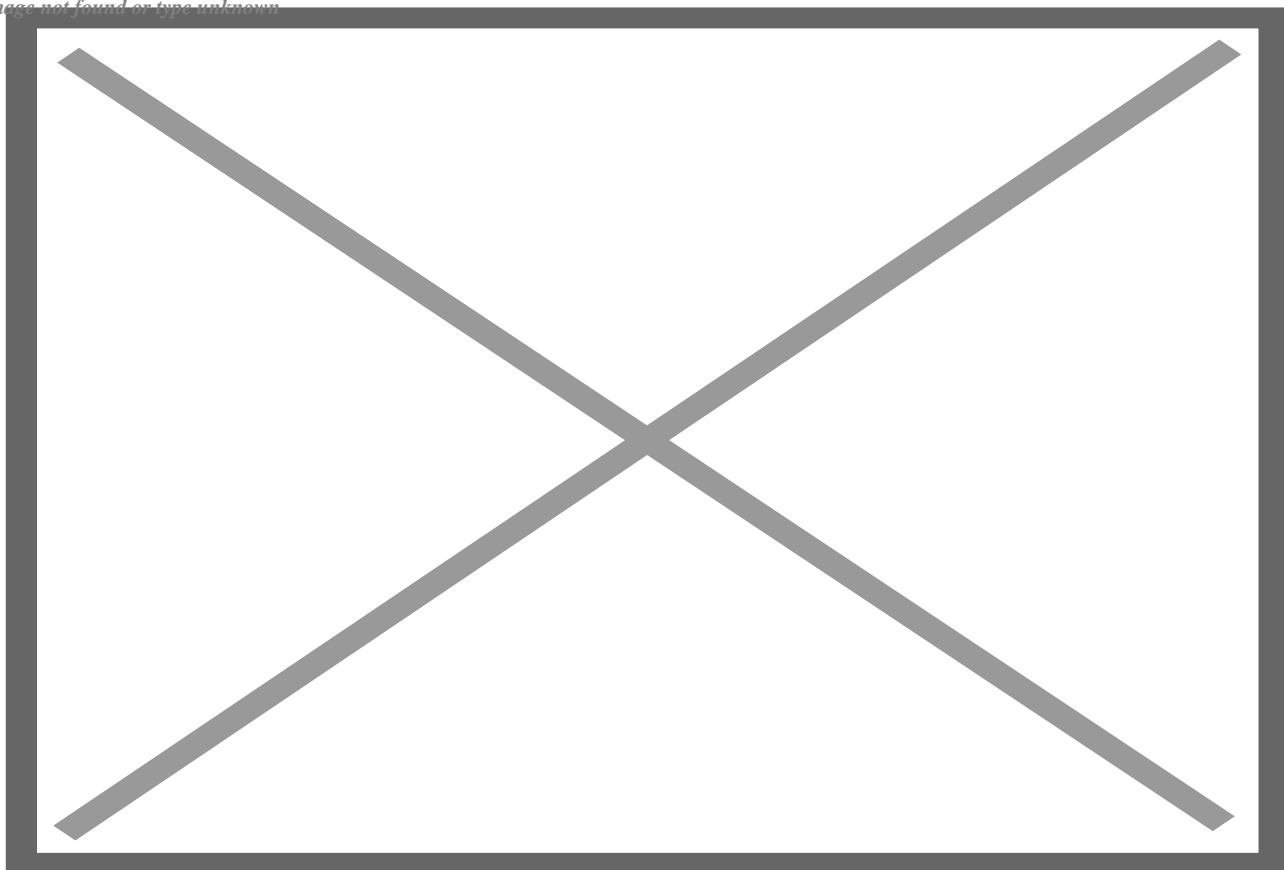


Without polyurethane suit, David Popovici brings down the sky

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David Popovici breaks the 100 m freestyle swimming record. Photo: El País

Havana, August 14 (RHC)-- In one of the sports news of the year, 17-year-old Romanian prodigy swimmer David Popovici erased Brazilian Cesar Cielo's 100-meter freestyle world record, and he did it without the controversial polyurethane suit.

All roads lead to Rome, where the native of Bucharest stopped the stopwatches yesterday in 46 seconds and 86 hundredths during the XXXVI European Swimming Championships, the same city where Cielo astonished the world in 2009 with his 46.91, in a world competition that became a feast of new records (43) thanks to the advanced attire.

With a bare torso and a tight-fitting fabric bathtub that reaches almost to the knee, the slim athlete of 190 centimeters and pronounced cheekbones opened perhaps a new era, in which the king of the pools will not be an Australian or an American, although we will forever remember the surnames Phelps, Spitz and Thorpe, without forgetting the Russian Popov.

Popovici swam the first 50 meters in 22.74 seconds, two hundredths behind the French Maxime Grousset, but in the second part of the main event he cut through the water like a dolphin to beat the stellar Hungarian Kristof Milak (47.47), a butterfly swimmer who ventures into the free with the same hunger for glory as the Romanian.

The polyurethane suit changed the sport for the worse in 2009, when it gave more than 50 hundredths of an advantage to the tritons and undines, so that same year the International Swimming Federation (FINA) banned it, without erasing the records set with the aforementioned aid.

The mark imposed by the young swimmer, world champion in 100 and 200 meters a few weeks ago in Budapest, does justice, without failing to recognize that the Brazilian Cielo was an outlier of his time, Beijing-2008 Olympic champion in 50 and several times universal title holder.

"I was just thinking about going fast and having fun, that was all," said the record holder after his extraordinary result, for which he declared himself very happy.

With Cielo's legendary mark surpassed, all eyes now turn to the extraterrestrial time achieved at the Rome-2009 world championship itself by Germany's Paul Biedermann in the 200m freestyle, one minute and 42 seconds.

If anyone can erase it, it is Popovici, although it does not seem possible that it will be in the ongoing tournament in the Italian capital, because in all honesty that time of the German seems from another galaxy.

At the Budapest-2022 World Championships, the 17-year-old Romanian was crowned with one minute, 43 seconds and 21 hundredths, the third fastest time in history, behind Biedermann and the Frenchman Yannick Agnel, with 1:43.14.

No one knows how far the slim young man will go, but it will undoubtedly be a long way and Poseidon is already looking at him with suspicion from Olympus.

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