

New Winds from the Republic of Albania's Swimming

By Besmir Buranaj Hoxha



Albanian Men's Swimming Team at the Mediterranean Games - Pescara 2009

This article focuses primarily on the distinguishment of the swimmers and their participation for the "Kuq e Zi" in international swimming tournaments.

Swimming in Albania has developed fairly recently in the past 7 years. The sport took an increased upturn starting around 2004-2005. In retrospect, one of Albania's first Olympic swimmers was **Frank Leskaj**. Leskaj was born in Philadelphia in America and was able to represent his mother land in 1992, after the fall of communism, in the Summer Olympics in Barcelona. Albania had not participated in any Olympic Games for over 20 yrs prior to the games in Barcelona.

It wasn't until 2004 where the newly assembled federation sent to Athens in 2004 two more swimmers; **Kreshnik Gjata** and **Rovena Marku**. Marku is the most well known and heroic of all the female Albanian swimmers in the "land of the eagles".

In 2005, a series of swimmers emerged in which Albania no longer had individual event swimmers. It is fair to mention **David Alliu**, **Klajdi Naska**, **Elird Kospiri**, **Malbor Oshafi**, **Klajd Vrahoriti**, where the beginners in representing the Albanian National Team in international tournaments. These boys were the first to begin breaking national records that had been stale for decades.



David Alliu - NR record holder in 2004-2005



Rovena Marku, 2008 Beijing Olympics



Besmir Buranaj Hoxha in Macedonia, 2009



Sidni Hoxha, 2008 Beijing Olympics

In 2008, Albania was able to send their most famous and successful swimmers, **Sidni Hoxha** and **Rovena Marku** to Beijing for the 2008 summer Olympics. Hoxha was only 16 at the time, and to many people's faith and confidence, he would become a 50m Free & 100m Free champion for the junior division in the Balkans. **Aldi Gugushka** was also supposed to participate in the 2008 Olympics.



Endi Babi, Rome 2009



Eros Qama, NYC 2009



Rome 2009, opening...



Sara Abdullahu, Rome 2009 World Champs

After the 2008 Olympics, Albania had an influx of Albanian swimmers who lived and swam abroad wanting to represent the motherland. **Endi Babi** from Toronto, Canada & **Besmir Buranaj Hoxha** from Houston, Texas & **Eros Qama** from New York City & **Eduart Cane** from Athens, **Greçia** & **Edwin Angjelli** from Boston, Massachusetts (USA).

Due to the Increase of Albanian swimmers training abroad, in October 2011, Shpetim Hoxha and Besmir Buranaj Hoxha started an Albanian Swimming Lobby organization. It is called the "**Illyrian Swimming Association**" (illyrianswim.org). The primary principle of the association is to unite all of the Albanian swimmers that train abroad from. The association holds valuable Albanian swimming information and is used to aid swimmers with Uniforms, funding, scholarships, participation in international tournaments, and representation towards FINA and LEN.

Even though the next generation swimmers do not hold any national records, they have been a huge part of the success in the sport of swimming in Albania. These swimmers have represented the country proudly and are great athletes in their respected strokes: **Denis Citozi**, **Juergen Fici**, **Gezim Hykaj**, **Elio Berberi**, **Florenc Llanaj** and **Mario Sulkaj**.

For the women, the next generation swimmers that are bound to be international super stars are **Sara Abdullau**, **Noel Borshi** and **Reni Jani**.



Sara, Tea, Debora and Rejsi Merni

Sara, an Albanian from Kosovo, at the age of 15 received an Albanian Passport and was able to represent the country in Rome 2009. Her swim times indicate that she will be a great competitor for the next years to come. Noel was able to compete in the 2010 Youth Olympic Games in Singapore. Other female swimmers that deserve notable mentions are **Debora Keci**, **Ledia Mema**, **Anxhela Kashari**, **Tiziana Jakova** and **Patricia Cani**.

The first three swimmers to be offered scholarships to swim abroad are Sidni Hoxha, Jon Pepaj, and Donado Dervishi. All three immigrated to the US around the year of 2010. All three are national record holders and all three are in preparations for international meets in summer 2012.

Introduce the new Albanian Swim Power....

Gallery of the Albanian Swimming Future...



Florenc Llanaj, Sidni Hoxha, Eros Qama and Endi Babi at the Pescara 2009 - Mediterranean Games



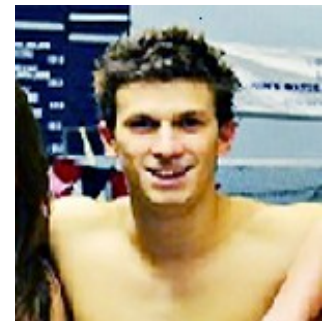
Sidni Hoxha posing for the LZR Speedo Photo Shoot



Debora Keci



Drin Llaloshi



Jon Pepaj (St. Francis College)



Eduart Cane trains in Athens, Greece



Mario Sulkaj at the 13th Fina World Swimming Championships with Fred Bousque (FRA).



Mario Sulkaj at 2010 Dubai SCM World Swim Champs



Juergen Fici at 2010 Dubai SCM World Swim Champs

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