

PRESS RELEASE: ASAJ

JULY 29, 2009

**FINA RULES ON SWIMSUIT CONTROVERSY AS WORLD RECORDS TUMBLE
AT WORLD CHAMPS**

The 13th FINA Swimming World Championship has been awash with new world and championship records; however this success has been clouded by issues surrounding FINA's handling of the swimsuit rules. By the end of Day 3 of the Rome World Championships, 15 World Records have fallen, equaling the total number broken two years ago in Melbourne and there are five days of competition to go. The question many are asking is: are the records falling because of the swimmer or the swimsuit? FINA's philosophy is that the swimmer should not be assisted, however there has been general disappointed at FINA's handling of this issue leading up to the Rome World Championships. In fact, many feel that the new suits should have been banned a long time ago.

In recent years, suit manufacturers have invested significantly in new swimsuit technology, their goal to have the "fastest" suit. Australia's Ian Thorpe dominated the Sydney Olympics wearing one of the early "full body" suits, but there have been dramatic leaps in technology over the past 18 months which some believe is responsible for the complete rewrite of the world record book.

Michael Phelps won eight Gold Medals at the Beijing Olympics using the then top of the line Speedo LZR Racer and is committed by contract to use the same suit at the Rome World Championships. In 2008 Phelps and his LZR was king of the pool. The new high tech suits offered by Jaked, Arena and others are made with polyurethane and cost US\$300 to \$500, not affordable by most swimmers. These high tech suits are designed and tested to reduce drag, some argue buoyancy as well, are believed my most swimmers to be faster. The top models are full body, leaving only the feet, neck, head, arms and hands exposed. They fit so close to the body that they are commonly called skins and it takes swimmers 20 to 40 minutes to put on their "skin". Many of the swimmers competing in the World Championships have developed finger blisters from putting on their suit each day!

Not all of the swimmers are convinced that the suit makes a significant difference, but they are not willing to “risk” being beaten by a swimmer wearing a skin and so the vast majority of the swimmers compete in their new high tech suits. Recognizing that the new suits do seem to make a difference, FINA acted and mandated that the high tech swim suit manufacturers such as Speedo, Jaked and Arena provide each swimmer entered in the Rome World Championships one suit free of cost – FINA’s reasoning was to ensure a level playing field. Additionally, all swim suits, including the old style suits made with the traditional fabrics such as lycra and nylon must be approved by FINA and have the required FINA label attached.

While FINA had recognized the problem, its membership forced the FINA Bureau’s hand at the FINA Congress held in Rome on June 26, 2009, and voted to pass a swimsuit rule amendment submitted by the USA. Yesterday the Bureau announced through its Executive Director Cornel Marculescu, that it has confirmed the decisions made by the General Congress. The new rule will be applied some time in 2010, the exact date to be determined by the time it will take the swimsuit manufactures to pass from polyurethane to textiles. Suit material will be restricted to “textiles” a definition that will be determined by the FINA Scientific Committee. There will be specific standards for buoyancy and permeability. Men’s suits will not be allowed to go below the knees and above the navel, while women’s suits will not be allowed to go below the knees, above the neck or beyond the shoulders. The rules will be published by September 30, 2009. The membership had hoped that the new rules would go into effect on January 1st, 2010 but it appears that manufacturers’ logistics may delay implementation until April or May.

Yesterday Michael Phelps, wearing his old style Speedo LZR, looked beaten when he was defeated in the 200 M Freestyle Final. Later he was relegated to lane three, the third seed, going into the final of the 200 M Butterfly – is it the swimmer, or the swimsuit? Only time will tell but rest assured, it appears that records will continue to tumble in the 13th FINA Swimming World Championships.

Submitted by John Eyre, President of the ASAJ