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Golden Synchro Team Inspires Chinese Coach

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LONDON — Russia set itself apart from the competition yet again at the London Olympics, winning the team synchronized swimming for its fourth consecutive gold medal in the event.

The Russians showed why they've been the sport's dominant power since the 1998 world championships.

Their height, speed, legwork and synchronization in the pool is far superior to anything the rest of the world is doing.

And the other countries know it.

"We are still some distance from Russia. They will be our targets in the future for a long while," China coach Zhang Xiaolei said. "Maybe gold will be our long-term aim. Russia is our motivation."

The Russians earned 98.93 points for a team free routine Friday that featured swimmers

doing acrobatic flips and pirouetting like ballerinas above the water. Having already won the team technical competition, they totaled 197.03.

"I am very happy that we managed to get the result with the girls and that we carried on the tradition of synchronized swimming," Anastasia Davydova said through an interpreter.

The team of Davydova, Maria Gromova, Natalia Ishchenko, Elvira Khasyanova, Alexandra Patskevich, Svetlana Romashina, Anzhelika Timanina and Alla Shishkina swam in black, red and gold suits featuring a spider web design on the back.

"The theme was a lost world like a big spider's net," Patskevich said. "We wanted people to get goosebumps."

The Russians swam, flipped and kicked their way through the songs "War" and "Step" by Denis Garnizov.

Davydova became the most successful swimmer in the sport, with her fifth gold medal, including three in the team event.

Her teammates Gromova and Khasyanova also earned their third gold medals in the team competition.

"This was the hardest medal for me to win and the happiest," Davydova said. "I finish my career on a peak."

She plans to retire and get started on developing the next generation of young Russian swimmers as a coach beginning in September.

"We train children from 3 years of age at school," Davydova said in explaining her country's success in a sport that uses nose clips, hair gel and dramatic makeup. "By 15, they are already ahead and competing."

Ishchenko and Romashina claimed their second gold medals of these games after winning the synchro duet event.

With Russia a virtual lock for gold, it was left to China and Spain to swim for silver.

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