

Nicola Spirig dominates European Games Switzerland's

4-time European and reigning Olympic Champion Nicola Spirig left a mark on today's inaugural **European Games Triathlon** in Baku, Azerbaijan, that suggests that if anyone is already considering crowning the USA's Gwen Jorgensen with the Rio 2016 Gold, that Memo hast not Yeti reiche Zürich. From the 4km mark on the bike today here at Bilgah Beach, from my perspective – and I'm here in Azerbaijan providing the on-site venue commentary – the remainder of the race was a battle for silver and bronze.

After super flat conditions made the Caspian Sea look more like a lake over the past few days, that was all change with strong swells and significant waves adding to the challenge on the two-lap swim course. Combined with shallow water requiring extensive dolphin dives and technical skills to enter the deeper water efficiently, the decision to scrap the planned beach run after lap one was a wise one.

First out of the water was the pairing of Rachel Klamer (NED) and Anastasia Abrosimova (RUS), who had a 21 second advantage over a group of 12 which included Lisa Norden (SWE), Aileen Reid (IRL) and Nicola Spirig (SUI) from the pre-race favourites.

Once on two wheels Abrosimova was quickly returned to the chase pack, while Olympic Silver medallist Norden went in the other direction and joined Rachel Klamer at the front. Spirig appeared to play a smart tactical move, and while I'm sure could have joined with Norden sooner, waited until the slight uphill on the motorway section of the route on lap one and launched the *Spirig Train*, her trademark move to seamlessly eliminate any swim deficit – but she did so with such power and apparent ease, that nobody could go with her. The sight of Nicola disappearing up the road must be a daunting one, and was certainly not what Ireland's Aileen Reid wanted to be seeing today. In that moment, her medal chances all but evaporated.

Spirig quickly joined with Klamer and Norden, and the trio was soon putting significant time into the chasers and the podium positions would surely be going to that threesome. The chase group could do nothing in response to the biking power ahead of them, and indeed the two chase packs would merge – but still arrive at T2 around 2:45 back.

Nicola Spirig was first out on to the run course, looking awesome, and clearly running her way to gold. Behind, Norden initially looked to be struggling but found her legs and was bravely hanging on to the pace of Rachel Klamer. Spirig was majestic, never looked in trouble and could enjoyed the finish straight and acclaim to add the inaugural European Games Gold to her extensive collection.

Over a minute behind, Klamer and Norden would reach the blue carpet still locked together, but the Dutch athlete – who had worked so hard to stay with the biking powers of Spirig and Norden on the cycle section – had the edge, and Norden despite her best efforts, could not manage to overtake the Dutch athlete. She still looked more than pleased with her efforts at the finish, and after having so many injury issues since her Olympic Silver medal and World Championship title in 2012, she should be.

In what was their first race together since that epic Hyde Park sprint finish for Olympic Gold in 2012, there was some real emotion and friendship between Spirig and Norden at the finish line. It was another great show – and kudos to Klamer too.

What stood out for me in this race was the biking power of Spirig. She simply rode away from the pack at will, and from the moment she made that early attack to join Norden and Klamer, it never looked as though anyone was capable of going with her. That is the sort of ability that the course in Rio will reward. If Jorgensen wants the Spirig crown in Rio next year, she'll have to earn it.

European Games, Baku 2015 - Saturday 13th June 2015
1.5km / 40km / 10km

Pos	Women
1st	Nicola Spirig (SUI) 2:00:24
2nd	Rachel Klamer (NED) 2:01:44
3rd	Lisa Norden (SWE) 2:01:46
4th	Yulia Yelistratova (UKR) 2:03:11
5th	Tamara Gomez Garrido (ESP) 2:03:27
6th	Aileen Reid (IRL) 2:03:58