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## Haughey (HKG): “The pool is my happy place!”

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At 22, Siobhan Haughey (HKG) is one of the rising stars in the world of swimming. At the last FINA World Championships in Gwangju (KOR) she almost made history, by finishing fourth in the 200m free, just 0.20 behind the bronze medallist, Sweden’s Sarah Sjostrom. Her 1:54.98 effort remains her personal best – in Shenzhen (CHN), for example, during the first leg of the FINA Champions Swim Series, she was second, clocking 1:56.88.

At the 2013 FINA World Junior Swimming Championships in Dubai, Haughey “enters” the FINA universe with the title in the 100m free (54.47) and also a fourth place in the 200m (1:59.94). At the 2014 Youth Olympic Games in Nanjing (CHN), she is the runner-up in the shorter distance and sixth in the 200m. At the 2015 FINA World Championships in Kazan (RUS), her best performance is a 14<sup>th</sup> position in the 200m IM, while in Budapest 2017 she “refines” her programme, focusing on the 100m free (also 14<sup>th</sup>) and 200m (fifth).



Shining in Shenzhen (CHN)

But this swimming talent didn’t fall immediately in love with the sport in which she now excels. “It all started

because my family was living in an apartment complex, with a swimming pool. I have a sister who is two years older than me, and my parents used to take her to the pool just for fun, when she was still a baby. So, when I was born, my parents did the same and when my sister was five or six, my parents sent her to a club nearby. When I was four, I joined her there and it started from then". Love at first sight? "No, I actually hated it for the first 10 years, as it was boring for me – swimming up and down the pool. But slowly, I started making a lot of friends and I saw the training sessions as a good opportunity to be with them. Later on, when I went to college, it was when I really started to enjoy it. This was not only because of results, but swimming allowed me to fulfil a lot of accomplishments. It's a hard sport, demanding a lot of effort, but I like the sensation of being free in the pool. It's my happy place".

Recalling her experience from Gwangju, she explains: "In the last 25m, I was in lane 3 and I could see everyone else. I saw a lot of hands moving, so I understand there were a lot of swimmers together in the same pack. I then thought that if I wanted a medal I had to go and get it. I touched the wall, I saw fourth and I felt a bit disappointed... Before the race, I knew there was people fighting for the medals, but during the race you are never too sure. I liked my time though – my personal best –, so in the end I cannot be too mad about it... Besides that, it certainly gave me a lot more motivation to move forward".

Born and raised in Hong Kong, China, she graduated in psychology at the University of Michigan (USA), continues training there and is naturally a solid asset for a medal at the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo. "It will be a very competitive 200m race there. The ones that medalled in Gwangju [Federica Pellegrini, from Italy; Ariarne Titmus, from Australia; and Sjöström] are definitively strong contenders, but I try not to think a lot about it. I rather like to focus on what I can do", she admits. Already Olympian in Rio 2016 (13<sup>th</sup> in the 200m), Haughey's first goal in Japan is "to reach the final in the 200m, and then not freak out there". On individual events, she has also the necessary time in the 100m free, while her National Federation also qualified the 4x100m free and 4x200m free relays for the Games.



Asked about her weak point when swimming, she easily admits: "A lot of them! First, the dive – I always struggle with my start. I have a slow reaction time and cannot dive far. I am working on both aspects, and it's getting better. My turns can also improve and we are also focused on that". On the strong points: "I like to be very calm before the competition, because I understand that being very stressful would bring me bad results. So, I take some deep breaths, I seat very calm and I wait in the call room".

About the Olympic experience, Haughey considers that, compared with four years ago in Brazil, she has "now more maturity and experience". "Rio was an amazing moment for me! But at one point you seem to forget that you are at the Olympics: you see stars everywhere and you don't see yourself at the same level as those idols. I was just 18, so I was truly fascinated. I got nervous in the semi-final and my coach, who stayed back home in the US watching the Games, could see just by the TV images that I was stressed. Now, after going to so many more meets, I learnt to just focus on myself and know what to do. So, I'll be prepared this time".

Competing at the FINA Champions Swim Series, Haughey is truly appreciating the experience. "Being now a professional swimmer, it allows me to travel to more international and strong meets like this. I like it very much. It's something different. It also more intimate, with just four swimmers per race. We are always together, we eat together

and we are more relaxed in the call room. It's an invite-only meet and the quality is high, but at the same time it's less stressful than a traditional meet. For the audience, it's also fun to watch, as it's easier for them to pick their favourites. I definitely like the freshness of this competition!" For Beijing, she hopes to improve her times from Shenzhen (100m free – 53.47; 200m free – 1:56.88) and to keep the "good momentum" of her preparation.

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