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Lima (BRA): “I take things step by step”

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Five years. Starting swimming at 12 and competing internationally at 17 is definitely not a common thing. But in the case of Felipe Lima, from Brazil, nothing seems impossible. “We can say I started late, only at 12, for medical reasons, but for me was not a problem. I progressed quite quickly, getting my first open national title at 18”, he admits. Born on April 5, 1985 in Cuiabá (Mato Grosso State in Brazil), his first FINA record dates back from November 2002, at the Rio de Janeiro leg of the FINA Swimming World Cup – sixth in the 100m breast, in 1:02.80.

“I started as a freestyle swimmer. But once, I went to a competition in my State and I had a good expectation in the 50m free – I finished fifth. My coach then suggested the 100m breaststroke, for which I couldn’t expect anything – I was second! From then on, I understood that my technique was good in this stroke and I definitely switched to breaststroke”.



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At his first appearance at a FINA World Championships – Shanghai 2011 -, he has a modest performance, only 24th in the two-lap event. One year later, he gets his first Olympic qualification and manages to swim the London semi-final of the 100m breast and conclude 13th (1:00.08). In 2013, the consecration arrives at the FINA showcase in Barcelona, where he earns a bronze medal in his pet event. After a less successful campaign in Kazan 2015 and following the non-qualification for the home Olympics in Brazil in 2016, he appears stronger at the Worlds in Budapest 2017, finishing fourth in the 50m breast. Finally, last July in Gwangju, he gets his second medal at the FINA World Championships, a silver in the 50m. His roll of honour is completed by four podium presences at the FINA World Swimming Championships (25m), in 2016 and 2018.

We can then say that, at almost 35, Felipe Lima seems to be at the top of his shape six months before the Olympic Games in Tokyo. “My preparation is going quite well. I have already swum several times under the A time in the 100m breast, and our national trials are scheduled on April 20 (the day for the 100m breast). I am quite optimistic – I train with Joao [Gomes Junior, also a Brazilian breaststroker, present in the Series] in Sao Paulo, we have a very good routine and we kind of ‘compete’ against each other during the training”. With a better world ranking time in the 50m (which is not an Olympic event), Lima has no clear preference between the two distances: “I never trained only for the 50m. The 100m breaststroke was always in my programme, and we constantly try our best to progress in this event”.

Foreseeing his participation in Japan, the Brazilian star is cautious: “I don’t like to see things that way. I prefer going step by step. Firstly, the national trial, and then going into Tokyo there are the heats, then a semi-final, and eventually the final. I believe that in the decisive race, the medals are open to a lot of swimmers. The favourite of course remains Adam Peaty, from Great Britain, who has a world record that is significantly better than any of the other swimmers’ personal best times. But the Olympics are the Olympics and everything can happen there. Who is better prepared and in best physical shape will arrive in the top positions. People don’t think a lot about times there, it is more important the placing”.

Competing for the second time in the FINA Champions Swim Series – he got three medals (including one gold in 2019), the Brazilian ace is quite enthusiastic about the competition. “It’s an event that came to renew the image of swimming around the world. It is an invitational-basis event, but I think it’s important that FINA can recognise the

strongest swimmers and allow them to gather and battle for good performances in the Series. Financially, it is also very interesting for the athletes, as it is a good way for them to continue investing in their career and their training. The format of the finals is quite different from the traditional swimming competitions, which is good. Having a direct final saves a lot of stress for the swimmers. One shot and you immediately see the result of your performance. It's quite straightforward!"



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After Shenzhen – where he was fourth (27.74) in the 50m -, Lima is optimistic concerning his participation in Beijing. “We have a heavy workload taking into account the period of the year. We came to China to compete, but we remain with the same routine that we have in this moment in Brazil – double training session a day, plus dryland work. The goal is to improve my time from Shenzhen – it would show that we are going in the right direction”.

On a more personal note, Felipe Lima likes to recall some of his idols in the discipline. “On a Brazilian level, Gustavo Borges – he opened a lot of doors for our country in this sport -, but also a famous breaststroker, Eduardo Fischer (a real inspiration for me). On a global level, I cannot forget Michael Phelps, the greatest Olympian in history”.
