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## Sarah Sjostrom (SWE): “You need to challenge yourself sometimes”

Anna Hamar, Head of Communications, Swedish Swimming Federation (SWE)

**The journey towards Tokyo has begun for Sarah Sjostrom, a veteran in the swimming world as she heads for her**

**fourth Olympics. The Olympic 100m butterfly champion lost the world crown she had won in the event four times in**

**the previous five editions at July’s FINA World Championships in Gwangju, but with gold in the 50m fly, two silvers**

**(50m free and 100m fly) and two bronzes (100m and 200m free) in an unprecedented haul she has won the FINA**

Sjostrom, who first won the 100m world title as a 15-year-old in 2009, was the oldest of the finalists in the Gwangju race.

*“But I still have just as great development potential as the rest of the girls in the final. It feels good to be able to say that as*

*a 26-year-old,”* she says. Sarah laughs as she’s saying it, but behind the laughter there is a seriousness.

When Sarah analysed that butterfly final at the World Championships, she clearly saw that she lost a lot of time in the turns and the under-water phase.

*“Even those who are 10 years younger than I am had a better turn and under-water work than I had in that final,”* she said.

Sarah’s poor turn gave 17-year-old Canadian Maggie MacNeil the chance to overtake the defending champion and touch the wall for gold, 0.39sec ahead of Sjostrom

*“The bad turn laid the foundations of my weak final in the 50m free, so that is something I will have to work on for my*

*future races,”* Sjostrom added.

Another reason for her defeat in the 100 fly was a problem with her technique, something she has struggled with for quite

some time: *“In the past I have always said that I don’t want to keep on and focus too much on the technique. In butterfly my*

*during the training sessions to see if there was anything we could change.”*

**I have at least 10 kilos more muscle**

**As a younger butterfly swimmer, you were often at the end of the field after the first 50 metres but had an incredibly**

**fast finish in the last 50. In recent years it has rather been the opposite. But will you try to find your way back to the**

**old way of swimming the 100 metres butterfly in the future?**

Not really, even though I have tried different ways of swimming the 100 fly in recent years. I seem to be just as tired in the last 25 metres, regardless of my opening 50. You also have to remember that my physical conditions today are completely different compared with 10 years ago. I have at least 10 kilos more muscle and I am overall stronger. So what was right back then is not necessarily right now.

**Your decision to add the 200m freestyle to your programme at the World Championships this past summer was**

I wasn't sure whether I would swim the 200 or not. But the last couple of weeks leading up to the world championships I felt that my shape was almost better in the 200m than in the 100, so I decided to go for it.

**As usual, you gave everything you had during that 200m free final, which earned you a bronze medal but also left**

**you so exhausted and fatigued that you needed oxygen after the race.**

I'm very happy that I won a medal. Otherwise, it would have been really unnecessary for me to squeeze the last drop of energy out of my body (laughs).

**Will you swim the 200m freestyle in the Olympics next year?**

No, I don't think so, but you never know. So I should probably say that it depends on how it feels when the competition is approaching. The 200m free will never be my favourite distance, but if it feels good during training when we get closer to the Olympics, I might just swim it. It is an incredible luxury that I have so many different events that I can choose to swim.



**When you decided to swim the 200m freestyle at the World Championships, you said that the 50m freestyle was the**

And it was, indeed.

**But after all, you took silver in the dash, only two one-hundredths of a second from gold!**

Yes, but look at the time (24.07) and you have the answer. Just a couple of weeks earlier, I did 23.78 at the national championships in Sweden when I was properly rested before the race. I know I would have swum faster at the World Championships if I hadn't taken on the 200 free. But even though I knew it would be like this, I don't regret doing it. I chose to challenge myself and wanted to try to take five individual medals in one championship. When you have been swimming at the top level as long as I have, you need to challenge yourself sometimes. Next time, I might choose a different challenge.

**I think the Olympics itself is a challenge big enough**

**Have you already thought about what your challenge for the Olympics will be?**

I think the Olympics itself is a challenge big enough. After all, the Olympics only come around every four years, and getting in shape and performing at your top level just at that moment is a challenge itself. But it's been a while since I did a PB, so that might be a good challenge for the coming season.

**Personal best means a world record for you?**

Yes, it does. Okay then, the goal is to swim in world record times again.

**You hold all the long-course world records in the 50m and 100m free and fly events, the fly marks are from 2014 and**

At the European Championships the summer before last, I was, for example, under the world record pace in the 50m freestyle until I had about 10 metres left. So if I can keep my swimming together all the way to the finish line, I know I can beat the world record in the 50m free.

### **And what about the 100m free?**

It's an event that I perform how I want to only every tenth time I swim it. But it's something I'm working on. For some reason, I usually have a good 100m freestyle race when I have really fast opponents next to me. This competition is often very open, the one who swims the smartest wins. I hope that it will be me one day. I don't have any World Championships or Olympic gold medal in that event, so maybe I should also set that as a goal for next year. Imagine to be able to swim a really fast last 50 at the Olympics, so fast that the others barely understand what happened. I would love that!

**I am proud of how I managed to perform and get five medals**

Sarah will not be competing at the short-course European Championship in Glasgow in December since she has chosen hard training during that period instead. Her competition schedule for the coming spring and summer up until the Tokyo Olympics has not been finalised yet.

*“What I do know is that I will swim the European Championships in Budapest in May. I really like to compete in Hungary,”*

Sarah says.

In March next year it will be 12 years since the then 14-year-old Sarah Sjöström made her breakthrough when she won the European title in the 100m butterfly. Since then, she has passed historic milestones a number of times. For example, she was the first female Swedish swimmer to win an Olympic gold (2016), she was the first swimmer to win four individual European Championship golds in one edition (2018), and at the World Championships she became the first female swimmer to have won five individual medals.

Which of these moments does she value the most?

*“It's always hard to compare, but I'm proud that I participated in five events in this year's World Championships and*

she responds. *“Of course, the Olympic gold also means a lot to me, and the world record in the 50m butterfly when I*

*became the first (and so far the only) female swimmer under 25 seconds is something I really cherish too.”*

