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## Oleksii Sereda (UKR): “I like how the Chinese dive”

Yaroslav Tokmachev, FINA Aquatics World Magazine Correspondent (UKR)

**Though the vast majority of the diving medals landed in the hands of the usual ‘suspects’ at the 2019 FINA World**

**Championships, Gwangju offered a glimpse of a fairy-tale when a tiny little boy from Ukraine, Oleksii Sereda,**

**almost plucked a bronze medal in the men’s platform. Barely 14 years of age, it was all very reminiscent of when a**

**diminutive Tom Daley kicked off his illustrious career with a stunning win at the 2008 European Championships,**

**repeated Daley's miracle and in fact bettered the Briton's 'age record' by claiming gold in Kyiv last summer at the**

**age of 13 years and 7 months.**

**Who brought you into sports and when did you start practising? When did you realise that diving is your sport?**

At four years old, I started to swim in the pool at the city of Mykolaiv, and soon I was introduced to diving. I learned how to swim and I was advised to try out another sport. Mum took me to swim, and after that the swimming coach recommended I try the diving. That's how it happened. The fact that diving is my sport, I realised right away, as soon as I attempted the first dives. I immediately fell in love with it. After I conquered a one-metre platform I knew I had to go further. The three-metre platform, five, seven, and after that I wanted to dive from the top of the platform. The passion for flights of a few seconds in diving grew with the years, and every day I am more and more convinced that I have chosen the right direction for my entire life.

**The biggest prizes are yet to be won**

**How many hours in a week do you exercise? What do you do in your free time?**

For four days a week I train six hours a day, for two days three to four hours, while I have a day off on Sunday. In my free time I like to play table tennis. I rarely also play football with the guys when the weather allows, though I like it so much. I

also really like playing computer games, Counter-Strike in particular. Due to my passion for this game, I even started watching video reviews on YouTube. These are my main hobbies outside diving.



**How did your family and friends react after your triumph at the 2019 European Championships in Kyiv? How much**

**has your life changed?**

I can't say that my life has changed much. Of course, reporters began to ask for interviews and that has just kept on going up till now. My friends and colleagues treat me the same way as before; nothing has changed in this regard. Of course, after winning the European Championships in Kyiv last year there was more attention than usual. Also, it was nice to get an educational bonus to have an opportunity to study at one of the best schools in Kyiv, in the Liko School. This gift was presented by the President of the Ukrainian Diving Federation Igor Lysov, for which I am very grateful to him. The school is located next to our pool in Kyiv where I train, and it is very convenient for me to combine study and sport. It is also great that my sister is studying with me (Oleksii has a twin sister, her name is Maria). Generally, nowadays, I feel like I'm at home in Kyiv city. My parents often visit me, and during the break between training camps or competitions I travel home to see them. The family is naturally very happy about my success, but everyone understands that the biggest prizes are yet to be won.

**How does it work for you to train in a predominantly female team? What do you like and what not?**

I like everything. We have a good team, friendly coaching staff. I'm not sure if there would be a difference if more male coaches trained me. Actually, I am coached by a group in which there are men. Naturally, they are stricter and more demanding, but everyone understands that this is solely for our future benefit in order to improve our results. And so, I think that gender doesn't matter, the main thing is the result.

**I like how the Chinese dive**

**What can you say about the past season? How satisfied are you?**

In general, I am pleased, in particular with a gold medal at the European Championship in Kyiv and an excellent performance at the World Championship in South Korea. The fact that children of my age took pictures with me seemed very strange at the beginning, but was insanely pleasant at the same time. I never thought that this could happen to me. There was a feeling of satisfaction, but I do not feel that I did something supernatural or special. When I finished fourth in the World Championships in Gwangju, I had thoughts that everything had worked out and everything was fine. I was completely satisfied.

**What was the most vivid emotion you felt at the World Championships in Gwangju? What was the most memorable moment?**

When I got to the finals and booked the spot at the Olympics, I was no longer worried because of the final. Well, in principle I was not worried at all, neither in the preliminary nor in the semi-finals. I understood that I was diving alongside the older and more experienced top athletes, and failing in this company shouldn't be scary at all. Of course, the fact itself that I could compete at the World Championships in South Korea was already incredible. That was an enjoyable thing for me, caused a storm of emotions and new feelings that I could be around in the big world of sports. Diving next to the Olympic champions was in general quite incredible.



**What can you say about the rivalry with the Russians and Chinese? What do you think you need to do to be at the**

**same level as them in the long term?**

I like how the Chinese dive and I strive to dive like them. They are great motivators for me. I knew that I would not be able to beat them at the World Championships for some reason, but competing against them was very cool. I'm looking forward to having some more battles with them in the future. I'm aware that I still need to practise my dives a lot; I must gain competitive experience – they have much bigger experience than me. Also, their diving list is stronger regarding DD. In addition to a strong programme, I need more competition. I am sure that all this will come with time.

**Can you tell me about your dive list which you plan to perform at the Olympics?**

I want to add 109C (forward 4-1/2 somersaults, tuck) to my list, but I will have to keep checking my physical abilities to see if I'm able to perform this dive well or not. I have already done a new dive but I need one more, and naturally a new programme will need to be tested many times before we will decide what to do. I know that this is always a challenge for young athletes, and not everyone can go well with it, but I will try to do my best to ensure that I will be able to come up with a new programme at the Olympic Games in Tokyo.

**I can only think of studying in the years ahead**

**How did the current lockdown alter your preparations for the Olympics?**

I had two months of dryland training during that period. It was about conditioning and technical practice on a daily basis, which made me stronger. Then I was able to return to the pool in mid-May and we are slowly shaping our adjusted training programme. We have normal training and camps too, there is no particular secrets in my preparations. I hope the Games will be held, as besides a good performance I also expect to look around in Tokyo. People said it was beautiful, full of fantastic things, so I would like to discover it.

**Do you read, study or learn something new?**

Apart from the current lockdown, I have normal classes in the school and I do my homework regularly. I try to keep up with the school curriculum and I'm trying to learn English; I understand that I need it everywhere, especially as an athlete of the national team. I try to learn and learn something new every day. I understand that the more I will be educated in the modern world, the easier it will be for me to cope with life's challenges. Though fortunately, as of today, I don't have to face many or encounter big problems, thanks to my age.

**In what profession would you imagine yourself, once you leave diving?**

I can only think of studying in the years ahead. For now, I don't have any idea which profession I would go for. Perhaps, I would like to create a business, earn money and follow in the footsteps of my parents to become a businessman. All of that is possible for today, at the end of the day, I can see myself doing that.

