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High Diving: the Olympic dream is closer

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The FINA Executive Director Cornel Marculescu announced it officially at the opening Press Conference of the 4th edition of the FINA High Diving World Cup in Abu Dhabi (UAE): our International Federation has formally requested the IOC to include this spectacular discipline in the programme of the 2020 Tokyo Games. “This is an extreme sport and will certainly bring an added value to the Olympic programme. Since the introduction of High Diving in the FINA programme, in 2013, the evolution has been amazing, and the moment has come to go further”, considered Mr. Marculescu.

At his side, one of the most experienced high divers of the circuit, Great Britain’s Gary Hunt was naturally happy. “This is a great opportunity for our sport. If we are successful, we will definitively have an exciting time in Tokyo 2020. Moreover, it will give the important visibility the sport needs”, confessed Hunt, the 2015 world champion.

In a day of training at the Yas Island venue, where the competition is taking place this Friday and Saturday, FINA spoke with several other stars on this important step forward. Jonathan Paredes, from Mexico, is evidently thrilled. At 27, he is emphatic: “We must fight for it! If there is a possibility, we must go and take it! If this becomes official, a lot more countries will start having athletes in High Diving. Don’t forget that China (very strong in pool diving) is still not present in our discipline...” says the Mexican with a smile.

Bronze medallist at the 2013 FINA World Championships, Paredes adds another dimension to this possible inclusion in the Olympic programme.

“This would generate an additional respect for our discipline. When we started within FINA, four years ago in Barcelona, we were a kind of ‘circus’ artists, a bunch of crazy people. Now, within Aquatics, this perception has widely changed, so I think that the Olympic factor could give the definitive value to High Diving to the general world”.

Positive image

His friend Orlando Duque, an icon from Colombia, perhaps the world's most known face in this discipline, is also optimistic concerning the Tokyo 2020 horizon.

“It’s a dream for all of us for many years now! Every athlete’s aspiration is to be able to participate in the Olympics one day. People say High Diving is a very dangerous sport, but for the ones that are within the sport we know that we can control those challenges. We have now a good image and the entry in the FINA programme definitively helped a lot”, explains the Colombian, first FINA world champion in 2013.

The universality of countries practicing the sport being one of the main criteria for Olympic inclusion, Duque underlines that while in the men’s field there is already a variety of athletes and nations, the women’s field “is still a bit short”. But this could rapidly change: “There are many girls on the starting blocks. If the Olympic dream becomes a reality, I am sure we can have some more women with a good level until Tokyo 2020”. Born in 1974, the Colombian could be 45 at the times of Games in Japan. “Why not? If until there Colombia does not have a strong team, capable of fighting for medals, I may still compete. It’s not a madness to participate in the Games with 45 years old – if Colombia is good then, I’ll step aside, if not, I could be in”, concludes Duque.

“I’m crossing fingers”

Lysanne Richard, from Canada, winner of the 2016 World Cup also in Abu Dhabi, was evidently a happy woman. “Great, great, and again great! I am crossing my fingers for that! This would be the best tribute to so many athletes that gave so much to our sport. I think on Duque, I think on Ginger Huber, from USA”, confessed the Canadian star.

At 35, this mother of three, clearly indicates the added value of this discipline in the Olympic programme. “The courage and perseverance are important qualities in our society. I think high divers have those two attributes. We need that in life, to face the danger and believe in yourself”, she considers.

Asked about the quantity of women at high-level competitions, Richard gives her native Québec province as an example. “For a couple of years now, we are organising some competitions in 10m, where athletes must enter with the feet first. If they reach a reasonable level, they then can dive from a higher height. This is something aimed at girls aged 14 and more, and is having a great success in Québec. Another thing we are doing there is that we are sometimes adding a mini-trampoline on top of the 10m board to allow additional rotation for the dives”, she explains. Then, pointing out to the tower here in Abu Dhabi, she adds: “Another idea could be to maintain these structures a bit longer in the organising cities of high diving events. Not only building them for the two of three competition days, but to keep them some months and generate some national interest”.

“Good time to push forward”

Ginger Huber, cited by Lysanne Richard, is the oldest competitor in the women’s field. As with Duque, she is presently 42 years old, but always competing for medals at the highest level. “My feeling? Happiness! High Diving is now very popular. It’s definitely a good time to push forward”, admits the US star, third at the 2016 World Cup. “We are becoming a very international sport – look at the number of countries represented here, 17. Concerning the women’s participation, I believe many of them would come to the sport if they could. If the Olympics will happen for us, it will surely be a cause for further development”, she says.

Huber then presents a very philosophical approach on the added value that the discipline could bring to the Games. “I see it as the Games in Ancient Greece. Athletes then were like gods, they were performing extraordinary things, very few could do what they do. I am not saying we are gods, but very few can do what we are doing. If you take swimming, there are thousands of athletes, with high diving it’s just a restricted group of competitors capable of doing it”.

As with Duque, the age factor doesn’t refrain Huber. “Yes, I would also be 45. But if this is a reality, it would help keeping the flame lit. I am not sure I could go, but I would definitely love to go! I take things as they come, so if I am strong enough, I could try...”
