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## Work vs Sport: high diving dilemma

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While commenting the possibility of an Olympic inclusion for High Diving (see here [1]), US diver Ginger Huber touched a sensitive matter. The discipline could have more athletes, but many of them have a difficult choice: to opt for a competitive career, or to continue with their professional obligations, curiously somehow related to... high diving!

In fact, many high divers work in parallel in acrobatic shows, where their skills are needed. Either in a cruise boat or in a hotel, there are many places in the world where these performances require divers with experience. And for many of them, this is their work. The problem is that those shows are very demanding in terms of time and availability and the options to compete at the highest level (with less financial revenue) are then reduced. "Especially with the women, this is a challenge", affirmed Huber.

Among the 36 divers competing in Abu Dhabi (UAE), we went through the entry list and selected two new names in the FINA world: Brazil's Murilo Galves Marques, among men, and Sophie Brundish in the women's field. For them, this fourth edition of the FINA High Diving World Cup is a première in terms of participation in FINA events. And for the South American this is also a debut in a 27m-platform.

As incredible as it may sound, Murilo Marques didn't need to cross the Atlantic to compete. "I am based in Dubai, and I am preparing a huge show starting in September. There, I train and will dive from a 22m-board. So, when I arrived here two days ago, I was a bit nervous. People may say there isn't a huge difference between 22m and 27m, but in fact from the height of 20m, each single metre is a huge challenge", he jokes. "The first day of training was a bit tense, but the second one was already OK". Apparently, the new height didn't impress much the Brazilian, as he concluded the two initial rounds in ninth (out of 23 participating divers).

Originally a pool diver – he trained and competed for Pinheiros, a club in São Paulo – Marques was even national champion, at junior and senior level. "In 2007, I tried the qualification for the Pan-American Games and the 2008 Olympics, but I couldn't make it. From then, I firstly move to an aquatic show in Germany, and then in Macau since 2009. Last year, they called me from Dubai, as they needed divers like for a new original and unique show, 'La Perle', directed by one of the masters in this kind of performances, Franco Dragone. Meanwhile, I was in the team helping Cesilie Carlton, when she won

the first world title in Barcelona 2013. That was my only experience with sport...”

When he heard that the 2017 World Cup was coming once more to Abu Dhabi, so close from Dubai, he decided to try his luck. “All the people I work with in the show are here to support me!” he proudly admits. Then, the difficult question: and if things work well and the qualification for the FINA World Championships this summer in Budapest happens (the best 18 in Abu Dhabi qualify for the FINA showcase)? “I don’t know, I would like to try, but for some years now, I have to give priority to the shows. I am not only a diver, I also coach some of my colleagues. So, I don’t have a lot of time available. The company was already kind enough to allow my presence here, the future I don’t know... But, one thing is certain: when you come back to sport, you like it a lot! And I am very appreciative of this experience”, he admits.

Marques then looks even further. Almost completing 32, he knows that an eventual inclusion in the Olympic programme could be an opportunity to compete at the highest level. “It would be great. This sport attracts media and spectators. People are amazed when they see us competing. I live from my skills of high diver, but competition is always there, in the back of our minds... Who knows...”



Sophie Brundish (GBR) - Photo by Giorgio Scala/Deepbluemia

## Gymnastics background

The same dilemma is experienced by Sophie Brundish. Her background is however quite different. Initially a gymnast, she left to Macao five years ago to enter in an acrobatic show. There, she started to get familiar with diving. “Firstly from the 5m, then 8m, 17m, and finally 20m. It’s a very different world: in gymnastics, you are more in contact with the floor...” she considers with a smile. “But I was quickly addicted to diving and despite the initial difficulties, I got acquainted and today is my way of living”, she concedes.

Invited to a Red Bull leg of the Cliff Diving World Series in 2015, Brundish continues: “I didn’t even know that this – cliff/high diving – existed. When I had the contact with Red Bull, I got surprised. And now here I am, in a FINA world event! I am super thrilled to be here, with the best of the planet in this discipline”.

Finishing 10<sup>th</sup> (out of 12) after the first two rounds, she confesses that she hasn’t “many available dives. I try to perform them the best I can, but there is definitively room for improvement”. Admiring her compatriot Gary Hunt – 2015 world champion -, she considers he has “unparalleled qualities for this sport”.

And the future, namely the 2017 FINA World Championships, in Budapest? “I don’t know. I am based in Macao, and I have

no idea if I will have some time off that could allow me to compete at the Worlds. It is still a huge question mark...”

Fortunately, recent history has shown us that many stars of the discipline were right to, one day, make the right choice.

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