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## Renan Alcantara (BRA): An answered love

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He was just a seven-year-old boy when he first saw a synchro training session. It was love at first sight. Renan Alcantara dived into the pool to perform difficult routines and has kept on ever since. This love for the sport, now newly named artistic swimming, made him persist and eventually win through. Today, at 24, he forms Brazil's mixed duet with Giovana Stephan and says he is happy the gender barrier has broken down in a sport once seen as solely feminine. To use a very Brazilian expression: "A great FINA goal was scored!"

He did not allow himself to be affected by the prejudices that surrounded him:

"I started at the age of seven, when my mother brought me and my two brothers to diving. When I saw the girls training in the front pool, in the Maracana Aquatics Complex, I fell in love and got into the sport. I trained until I was 12 years old, but for a long time there was no opening for men in the sport, so I ended up doing dance. I returned to training at 17, but FINA had not yet sanctioned male participation either."

"Today the acceptance is enormous"

Finally admitting mixed synchro in Kazan 2015, FINA took the long-awaited step.

"Today is a dream that took a long time to become reality. I've been passionate since I was a child, and I am very grateful to this sport, to all who helped me to get here. It took a lot, but finally this gender barrier in the sport was broken. The setbacks I felt more on my skin (on a daily basis) as a child when I was more vulnerable. Even in my teens I had very difficult days, but today the acceptance is enormous. Strange sometimes the hurting approach still exists, but I do not care, my dream is greater than any comment or thought of others," Alcantara said.



At last year's World Championships he was Romeo in the free routine based on Romeo and Juliet' and the Prince of 'Sleeping Beauty' in the technical: romanticism in high doses to delight the crowd with his partner and girlfriend in the beautiful pools set in the City Park in Budapest. Stephan herself sacrificed the chance of a place in the Brazil synchro team at the home Olympics of 2016 to concentrate on creating their mixed duet. Their routines illustrate their relationship, as well as Renan's relationship with the sport which has absorbed the Rio de Janeiro 'carioca' for the past 17 years and in which he has fulfilled his dream.

"My biggest obstacle was to start training at high level. It was a tremendous shock to have to learn everything again and a great challenge for me. Today my biggest challenge is to advance at every training and learn more and more. It is a tremendous responsibility to be a part of the Brazilian national team," he said.

In Budapest, Alcantara and Stephan finished seventh in both the free and technical programmes of the mixed duet and thrilled a lot of people with their performances. In this magazine Russian world champion Aleksandr Maltsev praised their efforts:

"I liked the Brazilian mixed duet. We got acquainted during our traditional training camp in Brazil and gave them a master class. I must say the programmes they executed at Worlds were very nice: with good choreography and personal style," Maltsev said.

Almost overwhelmed at the start in a premiere on a stage so great, the two managed to have fun at the end and were able to demonstrate what they had practised so hard. They wrote another beautiful page in the history of Brazilian sport as the country's first mixed duo to compete in the FINA World Championships.

The pair, who have been training for two years, made the most of the opportunity with the themes 'Balé da Bela Adormecida' and 'Romeu and Julieta'. Beyond charming the audience in Hungary, they achieved a great result: never before had Brazil reached such a high placing (7th) in synchronised swimming at the FINA World Championships.

### "We trained several times in cold water"

According to Renan, there are things which make their life more difficult than prejudice and suspicion. Those are the obstacles in the structure of the sport: facilities, financial and other kinds of support, of which they are really short.

"We need more encouragement from the country. It is very difficult to be an athlete in Brazil, because we cannot live only for the sport as an athlete's career is very short. We give up everything to represent our country. And the lack of encouragement is very difficult. We trained several times in cold water, without money, sometimes we spent our own money for trips, equipment, costumes... All in order to be able to practise the sport in Brazil and represent Brazil," he said.

Renan is not just speaking for himself. He sees great potential for the sport in Brazil and for its growth among men. He is happy to see the existence of five mixed duets in the country - less than three years ago there was only himself and Giovana. He also reveals that the growth has been so significant that at the 2018 Brazilian Championships there will be a male solo trial for the first time.

"It's very nice to see other boys doing the sport and changing their lives without fear and prejudice. This fight for inclusion in the sport is what moves me and strengthens my will to spread the sport in Brazil and around the world," says Renan.

## "I'm passionate about art in general"

Alcantara says he has admired American Bill May since the age of seven, when he started in the sport:

"I was able to compete with him at the Budapest World Championships. It was an incredible milestone for me. My admiration is also very great for the Russian, Aleksandr Maltsev, and the Russian mixed duet. They are amazing and a daily inspiration too."

Inspired by these idols, Alcantara does not rule out the possibility of realising another dream, one which is the same for every professional athlete: the Olympic Games.

"There was a possibility of getting into the 2020 Games, but it didn't go through this time. The chance remains for 2024 and why not train and fight for this to happen? It's not too far. We'll have more time by then," he said.

The training routine of the Brazilian duet runs from Monday to Saturday. On Tuesdays and Thursdays they train morning and afternoon, and on the other days they have one session. On average they have six hours of daily workouts. That does not prevent Renan from studying psychology at university and finding time for his artistic soul: he plays and composes music, draws, paints pictures and dances very well.

"I'm passionate about art in general. When I'm not in the pools, I'm playing the piano, composing songs, drawings, paintings, visiting a new museum or going to ballets and operas," he says.

When art and sport meet, there are no barriers.

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