

“When we swim together, we are connected” : Charlotte & Laura Tremble (FRA)

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October 25, 2018. Twin sisters Charlotte and Laura Tremble have just spent a full day in the pool for the final stage of the Olympic duet trial procedure at the INSEP (National Institute of Sport, Expertise and Performance) training centre near Paris. This was the day that would shape the rest of their career in artistic swimming, whatever the outcome. This was a day the two 19-year-olds had been working towards for the last 13 years.

They were up against team-mates Maureen Jenkins and Eve Planeix for the coveted honour of potentially representing France in the duet at the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo. The two pairs had fiercely competed against one another all through 2018, but one duet had never clearly positioned itself ahead of the other.

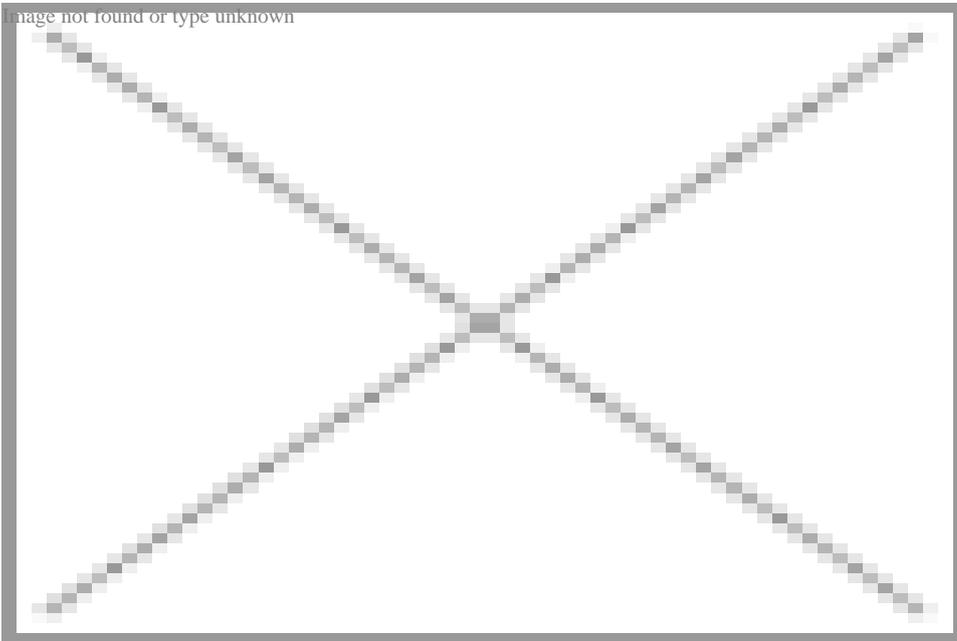
“It changed our lives”

This late October trial would determine which duet would go on for the next two years. Both were evaluated not only by their own coaches but also by official judges on technique, sharpness, stability, height, presence in the water and more. It was now crucial for the coaching staff to move forward with only one duet, not only to optimise training time but also to show growth and progress in front of the judges in the next two years leading up to the Games, where only one duet can be entered.

When the staff announced that the twins had been picked, the news barely hit them. They stood there baffled, incredulous and also almost afraid to show emotion as they were pained to hear the heartbreaking sobs of their team-mates next to them. Charlotte and Laura’s dream had just come true, but they could not fully grasp the magnitude of the news quite yet.

“Hearing that announcement was actually very hard,” said Charlotte. “Laura and I were absolutely thrilled, but at the same time we had our friends who were so distressed because their own dreams had just fallen apart. It was a very peculiar moment for us but it changed our lives.”

“Yes, I agree with that,” said Laura. “Plus, we just wanted to know which duet would be picked for Tokyo. So the moment we had finished with that trial, a huge weight had already lifted off our shoulders. But yes, it took us a long time to realise we had done it.”



Few would have picked them as strong contenders earlier on as they followed quite an untypical path in the sport: they always stuck to smaller clubs close to home, never integrated a 'pôle espoir' (a sort of youth sports training school that welcomes hopeful athletes and helps them train and study in a structured environment), were never even part of a team until 2015 and were never national champions at the elite level.

Charlotte and Laura started artistic swimming, or synchro, at the age of six in their little hometown of Senlis, north of Paris, after one of their childhood friends invited them to her own synchro show. They were also taking dance and gymnastics classes at the time, but they quickly preferred synchro as it combined everything they liked, all in one: swimming, dancing and gymnastics.

“Our mum was hoping one of us would do synchro and the other gym,” Laura said. “But as time went by, we realised that we both wanted to do synchro. Eventually the hours of training increased too much in both sports and we couldn’t reconcile the two anymore, so we decided to quit gymnastics. It wasn’t a very hard decision.”

After three years in Senlis they went to the club of Compiègne, still close to home, for a year, but it didn’t go smoothly and they almost quit before the end of the season. Thankfully, Corinne Rousselin from the nearby club of Rueil-Malmaison took them under her wing for the rest of the year. It clicked straight away and Rousselin became their sole coach for the next four years.

“I couldn’t live without my sister for too long”

Being twins is certainly an advantage in a sport that favours similarity, synchronisation and comparable body shapes to achieve the perfect visual effect. While it promotes confidence and trust, swimming with your sister is, however, not always a walk in the park.

“The big advantage is that we know each other inside out,” said Laura. “We can deal with each other really well in competition or during training. We can anticipate one another’s actions and thoughts. We do complete each other really well.”

“It’s amazing to swim with Laura because when we swim together, we are connected,” added Charlotte. “But we are sisters so it’s unavoidable that we bicker, especially when we are

together 24/7. But it never lasts long and we try not to do it during practice because it affects our swims.”

“The negative side is that when we have something to say, we are very direct with each other so it can get a bit harsh,” said Laura. “Sometimes we need to have our own space for a little while and do our own things. But yeah, it never lasts and thankfully neither of us is resentful. I couldn’t live without my sister for too long.”

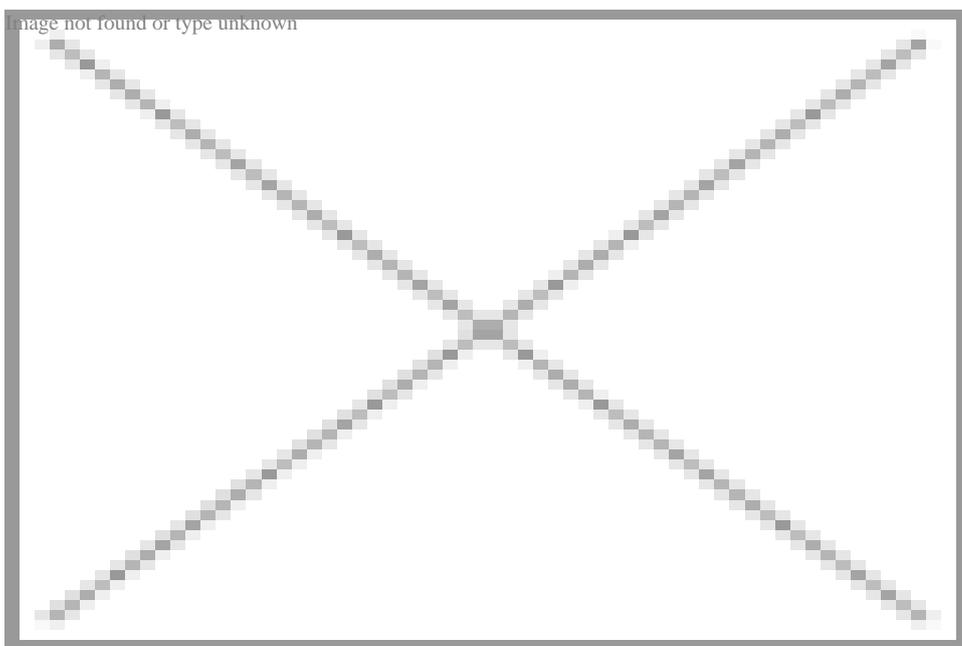
In France, if a swimmer aims to reach the national teams, he or she is typically put under pressure or persuasion to join a ‘pôle espoir’ youth training centre, often far from home. These centres aim to prepare and acclimatise the athletes to the higher training regimen and expectations of the elite level, all the while continuing their middle or high-school studies.

This option, however, never seemed attractive to the twins. They were perfectly happy staying at home, training on their own, improving and reaching the same skill levels as those swimmers. Charlotte and Laura are currently the only ones in the senior national team who have never gone through one of those training centres.

“At that time, we were telling ourselves that we were making things so complicated,” said Charlotte. “But we never lost our motivation. In hindsight, I’d say it definitely toughened us up and maybe that’s actually why we got to where we are today.”

“It’s true we took a unique path and it wasn’t easy every day,” added Laura. “Thankfully our family has always supported us and has done all these round-trip car rides to the pool because it was quite far away from home.”

They eventually left the nest at 15 when they were integrated in the junior national team full-time at INSEP in the autumn of 2014: “*We had time to mentally prepare for the move. So it wasn’t too hard for us. Besides, we had each other. And our days have been so busy anyway from the start that we don’t really see time pass,*” Laura said.



“We all improved together with this powerful target”

The road to joining INSEP wasn't always easy, but the twins are now among the veterans of the team and have been no strangers to the international scene ever since. In their first year there, they represented France in duet and team at the inaugural European Games in Azerbaijan, where they finished seventh and fifth respectively. In 2016, they placed eighth in the duet at the FINA Junior World Championships in Russia.

In 2017, they swam in both junior and senior categories. It was a busy year between the FINA World Series meets, the junior European Championships in Serbia and the FINA World Championships in Hungary. They performed in the technical duet at the Worlds, where they finished 11th, and also placed 10th in free team and eighth in combo. The technical duet had been one of their weaknesses and they admit competing in it at their first major senior meet was an intimidating challenge, but they were pleased with the final results, especially after dealing with nagging shoulder injuries all season.

“It was a hard season because of our injuries, and we even had to take a few breaks,” said Laura. “It was, however, also an enriching year because we competed a lot, including at our very first senior world championships.”

In 2018, not only was there the fierce internal competition between the duets and another busy competitive schedule to handle, but the national team staff also increased the training load in the hope of moving up the ranks and eventually qualifying a full team for Tokyo.

“It was a heavy season physically but mentally too, since we had that duet competition,” said Charlotte. “But with our bond with one another, we were able to handle the daily stress because [both duets] would train together often. I think the big goal of making it as a team to Tokyo is really something that lifted us all up at practice. We all improved together with this powerful target.”

“That competition was very stressful”

At the European Championships in Scotland, Charlotte and Laura were once again entered only in the technical duet event and placed seventh. They also placed sixth in both technical and free team.

“That competition was very stressful because we had to make a strong impression as we were then still contenders to become the Olympic duet,” said Laura.

Charlotte and Laura not only compete and train together, on average five hours a day, but they also live together, share the same group of friends and follow the same studies in the fields of engineering. They both hope to go into aeronautical engineering, although Charlotte is also contemplating sustainable development. They are very realistic about the future and know the chances of becoming a professional artistic swimmer in France are non-existent.

“We are spreading out our classes, so it's going to take us twice, maybe three times the amount of time as normal,” said Charlotte. “But this project is very dear to us. We have to get our lives ready for the phase after synchro.”

Now that the call for the duet has been made, they will mostly focus on that event for the 2019 season and won't be part of any team routines except the highlight. Assuming qualification for Tokyo in duet, which they are in good shape to achieve, they'd like to at least match the eighth-place finish of the 2016 French pair. They are also not closing the door on the 2024 Paris Olympics, where France will be automatically qualified in duet and team, the only two Olympic events.
