

## Fred and Alena

### Edinburgh's great French double act

When Fred Vergnoux took over as City of Edinburgh's Head Coach at the start of 2005, the package included a huge bonus. His partner (they married three weeks into the job) just happened to be a world 200m freestyle champion, Alena Popchanka.

Alena arrived at the Commonwealth Pool with a wealth of experience and a glittering array of achievements. As an addition to the Edinburgh squad, she was a perfect role model. She is professional, disciplined and someone whose career had flourished despite some unconventional setbacks.

To date, Alena Popchanka has competed for Belarus in three Olympic Games and won the world title for her country in Barcelona in 2003. Three years ago she decided to allegiance to France - and she duly captured a bronze relay medal for her new team at the world championships in Melbourne in March.

As with all her Scottish colleagues in Edinburgh, the next big goal is Beijing 2008. A fourth Olympic Games would be the perfect addition to a colourful and gloriously successful career - and the perfect swan song before she and Fred start contemplating a family.

Alena's career started typically as a very young girl in Gomel, Belarus. "I was picked out at the age of nine to attend a special sports school," explained the 27-year-old, who is doing her best to improve her English. "I did dancing and gymnastics but then started to concentrate fully on swimming.

"I went to the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta as part of the relay squad and then managed to make a semi-final in Sydney. I moved to France in 2002 because I felt I needed a change in training style, I wanted more variety." It certainly paid off as she went on to win world gold the following year.

But she didn't just find a better training regime - she also fell in love with her coach. With such strong ties, she decided it would be a good idea to switch nationality and compete for France.

Perhaps understandably, Belarus did not want to lose their world champion and she competed for Belarus at the 2004 Olympics (reaching finals in freestyle and 'fly) in Athens before pressing ahead with the intended move.

"There was a lot of pressure from Belarus," said Fred. "There is a rule that says you must have 12 months out of international

## Alena Popchanka



competition in order to switch country - but usually the rule is waived. But Belarus insisted she paid the full penalty."

It meant she missed the chance to defend the world championship in Montreal in 2005. The silver lining was that she had a long break from the sport and it helped to recharge the batteries. "It was almost like a little holiday," explained Fred. But now it is full power towards Beijing.

The arrival of such a high profile swimmer has undoubtedly benefited all her clubmates at the Commonwealth Pool, while Alena appreciates living and training in Edinburgh.

"I think the Scottish swimmers in general have it tough because of the lack of 50m pools," she says. "Edinburgh is lucky to have the Commonwealth Pool. But, in France, there were far more pools and better training times."

Living life both as husband/wife and coach/swimmer could present some problems. But Fred suggests there are pluses and minuses. "I know her better than anyone and can give her confidence," says Fred. "It is a little tough when you are together all the time but Alena's very good at switching off."

So far, they have managed to fit in some sightseeing. They've toured the Borders and have 'done' Edinburgh's city sights. They also love living near Meadowbank. "It's five minutes to the Pool and there are some lovely walks and places to run in the park," says Alena.

At the moment, Fred, Alena and everyone connected with the City of Edinburgh is fully focussed on Beijing. After that, Mr and Mrs Vergnoux will start thinking about starting a family - maybe baby could swim for Scotland?

## COACH'S CORNER

### FRED'S FEEDBACK FROM CANET CAMP

June is a hectic month. It starts with the Mare Nostrum Series in conjunction with a training camp in Canet. It will end with the Scottish Championships in Glasgow. There's certainly no rest for Olympic aspirants.

We have been to Canet many times. It is a specialised swimming camp with the pool, an outdoor gym and accommodation all on site. It really is perfect – nice and relaxed and the swimmers stay together in flats.

Kirsty Balfour, Alena Pochanka, Gregor Tait, Kris Gilchrist, David Leith, Rob Lang, John Owen, Michael Jamieson, Megan Gilchrist and Robyn Matthews will be taking part in the Canet Meet. Robyn, David, Michael and Megan will also take part in the Barcelona leg of the Series.

Trips away from Edinburgh are very beneficial. Swimmers can concentrate 100% and there is more pool time than at home. We can also do some filming and analysing – the timetable can be nice and flexible.

The Scottish Championships are part of a big picture that will hopefully have a host of Edinburgh swimmers at the Olympics next year. It is an important competition, but we won't be specifically targeting the championships.

---

### CHRIS'S CHAT FROM LOUGHBOROUGH

We recently teamed up with Loughborough for a week long training camp. Our women – Kirsty Balfour, Alena Popchanka, Megan Gilchrist and Robyn Matthews – really benefited from working with Scot Caitlin McClatchey, Julia Beckett and Kate Haywood.

For our two boys – Kris Gilchrist and Gregor Tait – it was a great chance to load up on big distance blocks of training. It was also a chance to pinpoint specific part of technique and work on the strokes.

We were piling up 12,000m sessions every morning – and that's great at this stage. Already, everything is geared towards the Beijing Olympics. Nothing else really matters than getting it right for our swimmers to peak in China next August.

---

### TREENA'S TIP



*"Strength and stability in the shoulders is essential for all top-class swimmers. Here are three exercises using stretch cords that will help to both strengthen the muscles around the shoulder and also prevent injury".*

*1. Lateral rotation 2. Rowing motion for strength 3. Pull down with both arms, again for strength.*

## SPONSORSHIP FOR CITY OF EDINBURGH SWIMMERS

Over the next 16 months, the City of Edinburgh squad will all be targeting the Olympic Games in Beijing. It will be 100% commitment – and they will all be relying on the support of family and friends.

Relentless hard work, demanding schedules and massive sacrifices are the pro-forma for a successful Olympic swimmer – unfortunately, large financial rewards don't figure in the package.

But, through sponsorship, businesses have the opportunity to link their names to successful Edinburgh sports stars. Kirsty Balfour could be collecting an Olympic medal next summer – wouldn't it be perfect for a local company to have helped get her there?

Backing can come in a variety of forms – logos on t-shirts, a sponsored car for a swimmer, an advertisement in the newsletter. It will not only benefit the swimmers – an association with a successful group of athletes can also be a huge benefit to your business.

If you are interested in any type of sponsorship or advertising, please get in touch with City of Edinburgh Swimming's Media Consultant Elspeth Burnside - [eburnside@btinternet.com](mailto:eburnside@btinternet.com)

Just think – wouldn't it be perfect to be have played a part in a British, Scottish and Edinburgh success story at the Olympic Games?

---

### MEET THE SWIMMER

#### Mat Trodden



- |                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Favourite band:                 | Rancid   |
| Best swimming moment:           | Making both 100 and 200m final at U.S.Open         |
| I hate training because....     | Every morning I wake up I am sore                  |
| Best night out:                 | Any night out with my mates                        |
| Edinburgh is great because...   | There is always something going on                 |
| Favourite sports star:          | Gary Hall jnr                                      |
| Favourite meal:                 | Macaroni and cheese                                |
| Favourite drink:                | Coke (could be in trouble!)                        |
| Favourite film:                 | Crocodile Dundee                                   |
| Favourite book:                 | David Blaines autobiography                        |
| Signature perfume/aftershave:   | Chlorine!!!  |
| Three perfect dinner guests:    | Jerry Sadowitz, Jeremy Clarkson, Samarie Armstrong |
| If I wasn't a swimmer:          | Rock climber, surfer or just a normal guy          |
| Something unusual about myself: | I'm a closet Bruce Springsteen fan                 |