

A SILVER STAR IN OZ

KIRSTY'S ON ROAD TO BEIJING

Kirsty Balfour did City of Edinburgh, Scotland and Great Britain proud with her silver medal in the 200m breaststroke at the world championships in Melbourne. No.2 in the world – it is a wonderful accolade.

Just as important, it was a first step towards another medal bid at next year's Olympic Games in Beijing. A top four finish at the world champs guaranteed selection, and Kirsty can now look forward to representing GB for a second time at the greatest sporting show on earth.

Don't want to pile on the pressure, Kirsty – we know she can cope – but there's little doubt that she has now established herself as one of one of Britain's leading medal hopes in China. And then London 2012...what an exciting prospect.

But it is the 2008 Games that will fill Kirsty's thoughts for the next 16 months, and she has already started to get a taste for the occasion. On the way home from Australia, Kirsty was one of the British team who stopped off in China to get an early look at the Olympic facilities.

"It was very interesting to see how things are shaping up," said the capital swimmer. "The outer structures for both the pool and the stadium are in position. We couldn't actually go inside but we got a really good feel for the place. We also saw some models – it looks great."

But it was in the famous Rod Laver Tennis Arena converted into a swimming pool swamped by thousands of spectators where Kirsty claimed her latest major triumph in Melbourne. Last year, it was silver medals at the Commonwealth Games and European Championships – this was another big step upwards.

"The Commonwealths were great, the Europeans were a step higher and the Worlds is the best of the lot," said City of Edinburgh's Head Coach, Fred Vergnoux. "Kirsty went to Melbourne knowing exactly what she had to do – and she did it."

The only swimmer to go faster than Kirsty, who holds the British record of 2:24.04, was the phenomenally talented Australian, Liesel Jones. At present, Jones is one of the world's stand-out swimmers – her best time in the 200m breaststroke is the world record 2:20.54.

Kirsty now has 16 months to try and close the gap before Beijing. She knows it is a big ask – but it is a challenge that the 23-year-old with strong Christian convictions is more than happy to undertake.

Kirsty Balfour



How will she try and whittle away the seconds that could lead to Olympic gold? "Hard work," is the decisive reply. "I just have to concentrate on what I can do. If I make slight improvements to my technique and get fitter and stronger then my times should get faster.

"It will need a big drop in time to match Liesel, and she definitely stands out as one of the best ever swimmers. But I will keep working hard and we will see what happens."

Fred has also set his sights on closing the gap on Jones. "Liesel is so tall and strong and that is what makes her such a superb athlete," he said. "You almost feel that the gold medal in Beijing is sorted, but you never can tell what will happen. Kirsty and I just have to keep working hard and try and improve her time. Then, on the day, you never know what the outcome could be."

Back home at the Commonwealth Pool, Kirsty and her City of Edinburgh colleagues face a strenuous summer routine. There won't be any holidays or even the chance to look forward to a series of glamorous overseas trips. The only serious competition will be a world-class meet in Paris in August.

"But it is good to have a constant block of training," Kirsty points out. "It means you can get down to some real hard work without any distractions. We've had four major meets in the last 12 months - Commonwealth Games, European Championships and two lots of world championships – that has been pretty tough.

"Now that I have gained my Olympic selection, the pressure has been eased a little. It means I can give my full focus towards Beijing."

For the Balfour family, the focus is also geared towards Beijing. Her father Scott was among the packed crowd cheering her to success in Melbourne – the family, including her three sisters, are now saving up for a 2008 trip to China.

COACH'S CORNER

FRED'S FEEDBACK FROM WORLD CHAMPS

Melbourne was the toughest meet the swimmers have faced during my time in charge, and I was delighted by their professionalism and overall attitude. Now, for all the swimmers, everything is geared towards the Olympic Games in Beijing next year.

Of course, Kirsty's silver medal was the highlight. She focussed on exactly what she had to do and it was a really big achievement to tie for second in the world. Closing the gap on Liesel Jones will be very difficult – but it's not impossible.

Alena's bronze medal as a member of the French team in the freestyle relays was also huge. Two medals at the world championships – that is very exciting for City of Edinburgh.

Kris, Rob and Gregor maybe didn't swim quite as fast as we had all hoped, but it was still a great learning experience. Competing in the world championships has inspired them all, and it is the perfect platform to focus on Beijing.

The Olympic trials are now less than a year away and it will be exciting to watch the swimmers' progress over that period. They will all be aiming to be in Beijing. It won't be easy – but the hard work will be well worthwhile.

CHRIS'S CHAT FROM THE BRITISH CHAMPS

Manchester was hard for the swimmers because the programme was topsy-turvy with the finals taking place in the morning. But Robyn (Matthews) coped really well and posted European Junior Championship qualifying times in both the 400m medley and the 800m freestyle. Now she can look forward to a trip to Antwerp in July.

Michael (Jamieson) and Meaghan (Gilchrist) both set National age-group records and the 4 x 200m freestyle relay team – Michael, John (Owen), David (Leith) and Ian (McMillan) - broke the Scottish Club record. That was a really positive way to end the meet.

For Robyn, it is now time to re-focus, set her sights on Antwerp and also take a look longer term. For all the swimmers, it's all systems go towards Beijing. They all have to aim high.

TREENA'S TIP

"Most swimmers are very aware of the need to follow a good stretching programme – but they often forget about the thoracic spine. Keeping it mobilised is essential to stave off the swimmer's bugbear of shoulder problems.

Stand with feet apart and hips in flexion (hips at 60 degree angle). Hold up hands as though you are going to be shot (elbows and shoulders at 90 degrees) and bend forward slightly. Rotate dynamically back and forth. Keep the rotation going – and it will help to keep the spine supple."



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

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

MEET THE SWIMMER

Robyn Matthews



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| Favourite band: | Jakil |
| Best swimming moment: | Breaking British 100m breaststroke record in 2005 and qualifying for this summer's European Junior Championships |
| I hate training because... | The smell of chlorine |
| Best night out: | A fun night with my friends |
| Edinburgh is great because... | It is very interesting and picturesque |
| Favourite sports star: | Nadia Comaneci (Romanian gymnast who won ten Olympic gold medals and was the first to be awarded the perfect score of ten) |
| Favourite meal: | Sunday roast |
| Favourite drink: | Hot chocolate |
| Favourite film: | The Holiday |
| Favourite book: | The Da Vinci Code (Dan Brown) |
| Signature perfume/aftershave: | Romance by Ralph Lauren |
| Three perfect dinner guests: | Justin Timberlake, Adam Brody and Kelly Holmes |
| If I wasn't a swimmer... | I'd probably be in athletics |