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Ledecky to take up leading role in US team

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The 17th FINA World Championships will usher in a new era following the retirement of American icon Michael Phelps with the start of the eight-day race in Duna Arena on Sunday. Here is Katie Ledecky, though!

This will be the first global meeting since 1998 without either Phelps, holder of 23 Olympic gold medals and 26 world titles, or compatriot six-time Olympic gold medallist Ryan Lochte who is ineligible to compete after a 10-month ban.

Unbeaten at the World Championships, five-time Olympic champion Katie Ledecky is set to continue in the Hungarian capital as she aims for a hat-trick of individual world titles in 400m, 800m, and 100m.

Similarly to Katinka Hosszú, she is entered into six events. Ledecky looks to defend her 400m freestyle title, however, US swimmers not involved in the race will be following Phelps' shark race.

"We're all trying to see if we can get the Discovery Channel at the hotel, so we could watch the shark race on Sunday." - the 20-year-old American said at Friday's press conference of US Team at Duna Arena. "I think I have swum maybe one or two practice races with Michael, so technically we kind of have raced. I would love to, but he has retired and we swim different events, so he would definitely beat me, I don't know if it would be very interesting."

Other five-time Olympic champion, Nathan Adrian doesn't worry about USA team's accomplishments without the two legends

"I hope we will not feel the lack of Ryan or Michael. We are the team of the United States, the best swimming team in the world, so if someone is missing, there is a next one to replace them, so we are able to win without Phelps or Lochte."

Ledecky could match Missy Franklin's record of six gold medals in 2013, the most titles won by a female swimmer at a single edition of the World Championships.

"I can't wait to race. It's different from my first World Championships in 2013 in Barcelona.

There are new faces, I'm honoured to have people look up to me. I still feel pretty young in this team, I'm still learning a lot, but I feel like I can have a little more of a leadership role. Even though we are missing some stars, we have a strong team. This is the first step towards Tokyo. It's been an honour to represent the USA, I don't really focus on gold medals and breaking world records, I just enjoy staying focused on the process and having fun."