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Sarah Sjöström: the goal is the fourth World Champion gold in Budapest

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The Swedish Sarah Sjöström could be one of the biggest star of the 17th FINA World Championships in Budapest this summer. The Olympic, World and European Champion will be able to compete just a bit after her 24th birthday at the Danube Arena, who won the very first golden medal of the Swedish women swimming history. She is in the short run to have the World Champion title after winning in 2009, 2013 and 2015, the question is how much emphasis she will put on the freestyle races next to her planned butterfly events.

The Swedish flag was in the hand of the Therese Alshammar, one of the the biggest athlete of the international and Swedish swimming community, during the Rio Olympics closing ceremony last summer.

The appearance of the prominent figure of the Swedish swimming in the '90s and '00s was a fateful encounter: she was closing an Olympic Games where the first woman Swedish Aquatics golden was won - and not by her. It wasn't realistic for her at all, she competed in the Swedish team at 6 Olympic Games during her career.

The 23-year-old Sarah Sjöström needed "only" three to have an Olympic gold her herself, in addition she was pretty close to it in 2012 already but she did not win that time yet. The 25 times World Championships and 43 times European Championships medal-winner Alshammar took home 3 Olympic silver in 2000 in Sydney and we could see a smaller parallel between her and Sjöström's career. If nothing else, the fact that Alshammer's partner is her coach, Johan Wallberg who happens to be the one in charge of Sjöström's training - since last November only, to be truthful.

„I and my coach Carl Jenner have had many years of great cooperation that has given me many and great successes. Olympics in Rio was obviously the culmination of our cooperation. I have always looked at the Olympics in Rio as a diploma, but also as a starting point for something new before my next four years until the Olympic Games in Tokyo in 2020” [she writes on Instagram](#), indicating that the choice of ending the work with her trainer, Carl Jenner has made later summer last year already.



Sjöström could have done a "Nico Rosberg", finishing her career at the top of after Rio immediately, but why would she do it? She is 23 years old and she was always interested and driven forward by new motivations and goals. Despite speaking out loud and clearly many times, in the last 4-year cycle mostly, that nothing else matters but winning a golden medal at the 100M butterfly, the life goes on and goals can be set up all the time.

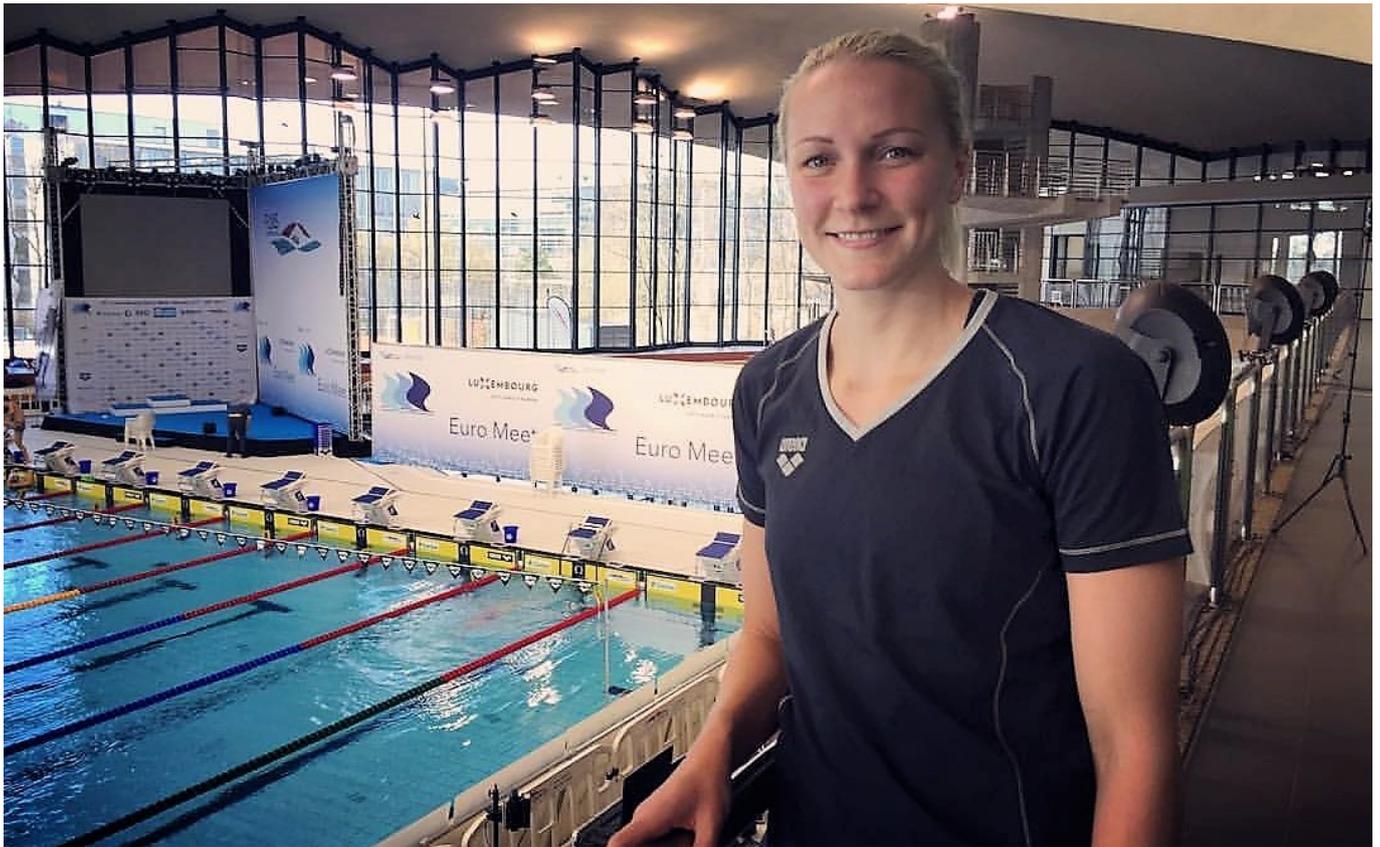
She started swimming at the age 9 and she was tall for her age later but she could handle her height later. She got in the spotlight of the public in 2008 when she won the finals of the 100M butterfly at the European Championship when she was only 14 (!) years old.

"From one minute to the next, that victory took her from a 14-year-old right into the adult world. I remember thinking, how should we now handle this the right way? If we do this wrong, this gold can destroy her life," coach Jenner, said in the latest issue of the FINA Magazine adding a bit to this story with mentioning that they put big emphasis to let her be a teenager and live the life of the youngsters.

Well, she was only the 27th at the 100M butterfly in Peking, her first Olympic Games but a year later at the World Championship in 2009 she won with a world record in her hands. She secured her European Champion position and put Alshammar to the second place, in Shanghai she finished at the fourth place. She arrived to London as a possible winner at her second Olympic Games, but shortly before Games she suffered with a severe tonsillitis, perhaps this contributed no winning as she wished at the Olympic.

She was devastated by the fourth place in London, she had to pull herself together from the floor. The Swedish Swimming Federation and the Swedish Olympic Committee supported her with all their power and their decision also, which resulted in building a new central training complex. The National Elite Centre (NEC) started in Eriksdalsbadet, Stockholm

after the London Olympics. Sjöström and the other athletes trained at the complex to reach the same goal, her motivation and mood changed rapidly in the good direction.



“The NEC changed everything for me. It is so much more fun to go to workouts when you have a group of people. You help and encourage each other. Swimming is an individual sport but it is so much more fun when you get to have your friends around,” she said remembering back to the 2012 events.

And she stood up, renewing herself and winning at the World Championships in Barcelona in 2013. *“I have never cried this hard for joy in my life”* she said.

After Barcelona, she shifted silently and or at least less spectacularly to concentrate on freestyle next to the butterfly and she done that so well that she swam a world record at the Short Course World Championship in 2014 at the 200M freestyle. Before this, she won the 100M freestyle in Berlin at the European Championship.

She seemed to be unstoppable and it was not a big surprise that at the World Championships in Kazan at the 50M and 100M butterfly she finished with gold medals, swimming a world record at the semi-final of the first race, outrunning many times the American Dana Vollmer who beat her in London.

She was the first Swedish swimmer to be chosen as the European Swimmer of the Year by the Swimming World in 2015. No wonder why everyone expected her to win in Rio. But can one bear this pressure? Well, the international swimming community was astonished by her professional attitude at and after the races (she listened music first in her career before the finals).

Previously, it was typical of her to speed up in the last 50 meters but in Rio she was swimming at top of her speed from the beginning of the race at the 100M butterfly, and it can be the reason why she was almost a second faster (0,98) from everyone, winning the fifth world record with the golden medal. In addition to this, she finished at the second place after Katie Ledecky at 200M freestyle and third place after Simone Manuel and Penny Oleksiak at the 100M freestyle.

Sarah Sjöström is the first Olympic gold medal winner Swedish woman (the ninth golden for Sweden) and the first golden since 2000 in Scandinavian colours when Lars Frölander won in 100M butterfly.

"Everything went according to plan. 100m butterfly and 200m free were the main focus throughout the season and they were also the distances where it went the best. I did my race in the 100m fly and I won the gold, and I achieved a personal record in the 200m freestyle. The bronze medal in the 100m free came to me as the biggest surprise. I always try to be realistic facing a championship and I knew that three medals would be tough, but it went well. In freestyle I have to fight with every stroke, it doesn't come as naturally as butterfly, but I like the stroke because of the challenge," said Sjostrom in her interview at the FINA Magazine sending a clear message to her rivals about her plans in the future.



"She's incredible. We're in the same training squad back in Stockholm and she's an inspiration. Everything she does is professional, and everything she does in practice is so excellent I get scared sometimes. Every day I race with her in practice and sometimes she gets a little bit too close!" - said Simon Sjödin to the BBC in an interview after Rio.

The BBC praised Zlatan Ibrahimovic during Rio whose popularity is nearly impossible to reach but seeing Sarah's results there could be a small chance to beat that.

'Ibra is inimitable. Most of the time the male athletes are in the spotlight because of their results but it feels fantastic to see myself in the light and news once' commented Sarah on the BBC statement that said her Olympic results blurred a bit of the Swedish football players light.

Well, looking the rebirth of Zlatan Ibramovich and Sarah Sjöström's potential, we are looking forward to see their 'battle' in 2017 in the spotlight.

Sarah Fredrika Sjöström

She was born on the 17th of August in 1993 in Rönninge, Sweden.

Discipline: Freestyle, butterfly, backstroke

Best results: Olympic gold (100M butterfly, 2016 Rio de Janeiro), Olympic silver (200M, freestyle 2016, Rio de Janeiro), Olympic bronze (200M freestyle, 2016 Rio de Janeiro), World Championship gold (100M butterfly, 2009 Rome, 2013 Barcelona, 2015 Kazan; 50M butterfly, 2015 Kazan), World Championship silver (100M freestyle, 2013 Barcelona, 2015 Kazan), World Championship bronze (50M freestyle, 2015 Kazan), European Championship gold (100M butterfly, 2008 Eindhoven, 2010 Budapest, 2016 London; 50M butterfly, 2012 Debrecen, 2014 Berlin, 2016 London; 4x100M freestyle relay, 2014 Berlin), 6 times European Championship silver medal winner, 2 times European Championship bronze medal winner, 3 times Short Course World Champion, one time silver medal winner (2014 Doha) and five times Short Course European Champion

Holds the following world records:

Long course:

50M butterfly (24.43, 05/07/2014, Borås, Sweden - Terese Alshammer in superdress)
100M butterfly (55.48 05/08/2016, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)

Short course:

200M freestyle (1:50.78, 07/12/2014, Doha, Qatar)
100M butterfly (54.61, 07/12/2014, Doha, Qatar)