

# Hong Kong teen Siobhan Haughey confident of earning ticket to Rio

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With school over, the next goal for 17-year-old is to become first local swimmer to qualify for Olympics through the 'front door'

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Hong Kong teen Siobhan Haughey has finished exams and now sets her sights on Olympic qualifying.  
Photos: May Tse

With logarithmic functions and Shakespeare sonnets out of the way, Siobhan Haughey has returned to the pool, an environment in which she is most comfortable. Her sights are set on becoming the first Hong Kong swimmer to reach the Olympics through the front door.

Hong Kong have had a long list of swimmers who have competed at Olympics, but by virtue of reaching the qualifying B cut times or through "universality" placement systems that give the smaller countries a chance to have an athlete in the swimming programme.

"As far as I know, no Hong Kong swimmer has ever qualified for the A cut and that is my target," says Haughey with all the confidence of a 17-year-old who has completed her Diploma of Secondary Education exams and knows the world is her oyster.

Preparing for an exam is mentally tiring while training for a competition is physically tiring

Siobhan Haughey

A total of 900 swimmers will gather at the Rio Olympics next summer. The qualifying period began in March and will run until July 2016 at Fina-approved events.

None come bigger than the world championships in Kazan, Russia, in August where Haughey hopes she will be taking part to achieve her Olympic qualifying goals in the 50 metres and 100 metres freestyle, as well as the 200m individual medley.

"There are two types of entry times for swimmers for individual events - the Olympic qualifying time [the A cut], and Olympic selection time [B cut]. Swimmers who achieve the A cut are automatically qualified, while those with a B cut have a chance, but not a guarantee, of being selected," says Haughey.

Furthermore, with each country able to enter only two swimmers in the same individual event, the chances are higher if they achieve the A time. Those with B times can only enter one swimmer in an individual event.



Siobhan Haughey

has had a tough time in juggling preparations for the DSE exams and keeping up with her training schedule in the pool.

In the women's competitions, the Olympic qualifying times in the 50m free are 25.28 seconds (A) and 26.17 (B). In the 100m freestyle, it is 54.43 (A) and 56.34 (B). In the 200m individual medley, it is 2:14.26 (A) and 2:18.96 (B). It's no mere pipedream for Haughey.

"My best times in those events are 25.38, 54.47 and 2:13.21," says Haughey, who holds the Hong Kong records for the 50m free and 200m IM. "My 200m IM personal best is faster than the A cut. However, I did that at the Youth Olympics, which unfortunately did not fall in the qualification period that has just started."

But having swum a faster time in the individual medley and come fractionally close to reaching the Olympic standards in the sprint events, Haughey is confident and happy that the exams are out of the way.

Now she can put her mind to her true love - swimming.

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Siobhan Haughey

"I like going to school and learning new knowledge, just like I enjoy swimming in the pool. However, preparing for an exam is mentally tiring while training for a competition is physically tiring," she says.

"Balancing both school and training can be hard, but it's all about having good time management, being disciplined and knowing how to prioritise.

"I am done with secondary school now. In order to manage everything, there were countless school days when I had to wake up at 3am in the morning to study or finish my homework.

"I also didn't go to any tutorial classes, which is prevalent among local students these days, so it was important to be attentive during class and ask questions when I didn't understand anything. I had to give up sleep and time spent with friends, and it can be quite tough sometimes. However, I think in the end they are all worth it."



An underwater camera captures Hong Kong's Siobhan Haughey competing in the heats of the women's 200m freestyle at the Incheon Asian Games in September last year.

Photo: AFP

Haughey, whose dad Darach is Irish and mum Canjo is Chinese, studied seven subjects for her DSE examinations - Chinese, English, maths, liberal studies, chemistry, business and English literature.

After poring over geometric sequences, crying over redox reactions and figuring out *To be, or not to be*, getting back into the swimming groove was a relief.

"This is my first world championships. I qualified for 2013, but I went to the Junior World Championships instead because my coach and I thought that was more suitable for me at that age," she says.

It turned out to be a brilliant decision; in Dubai Haughey became the first local swimmer to win a gold medal at the Junior World Championships, winning the blue riband 100m freestyle with a personal best of 54.47. To add spice, she defeated Lithuanian star Ruta Meilutyte, a winner of the 100m breaststroke gold medal at the London Olympics a year before.

"If I qualify it will be my first Olympics. Going to Rio has always been my dream and my long-term goal. I competed in more international races these two years and gained many racing experiences, which makes me more eager and determined to be at the Olympics," says Haughey, who will leave for the University of Michigan at the end of August.

"Also, my personal bests are very close to the A cut so the 'Olympic dream' doesn't seem so unrealistic after all. I will also be training with a new team and working with new coaches at the University of Michigan.

"This will be a big change for me. However, I am very excited about that and am confident the coaches there can help me take that next step."

At the 2014 Asian Games in Incheon, Haughey couldn't quite sparkle individually, although she anchored the relay team to three bronze medals. But her talent is undisputed and Hong Kong have a star in waiting.

"The Asian Games was a good opportunity to compete with the top swimmers in Asia and although I didn't do personal bests in all of the events, I did do a best time in the 200m free. I came fourth in the 100m and 200m free, and fifth in the 50m free. Winning three relay medals at my first Asian Games was also something I'm proud of.

"Everything is going well."