



Siobhan Haughey makes history by becoming Hong Kong's first swimmer in modern era to reach Olympic semi

Teenager is first HK athlete to make it through the heats since Cheung Kin-man in 1952

Siobhan Haughey made Olympic history for Hong Kong by qualifying for the semi-finals of the 200m freestyle at Rio's Aquatics Centre on Monday.

The 18-year-old is believed to be the first HK swimmer to achieve the feat since Cheung Kin-man at the Helsinki Olympics in 1952.

Haughey comfortably won her heat in one minute 56.91 seconds to qualify in ninth place – ahead of four-time Olympic gold medallist Missy Franklin.

"I'm delighted for Siobhan," said team-mate Camille Cheng Lily Mei, who was in the same heat. "I'm disappointed by my time but that was an amazing swim.

"I think that's two seconds or more better than her PB. That'll get her a swim at night [semi-finals] for sure."

The women's 200m freestyle semi-finals will be on at 9am HKT (Rio's Monday night 10pm).

Haughey did not speak to the media as she focuses all her attention on the semis.

She was due to compete in the 200m Individual Medley less than an hour after her freestyle heat, but pulled out to ensure she is totally fresh for the biggest race of her life.

Haughey will be up against American phenomenon Katie Ledecky and Sarah Sjöström, both of whom set world records in the pool here on Sunday night, and the current 200m free world record holder Federica Pellegrini.

The teenager is the second youngest of the 16 semi-finalists – China prodigy Ai Yanhan is only 14.

Her University of Michigan coach Mike Bottom, the assistant coach of the all-powerful US team here in Brazil, told the Post earlier this year that Haughey could even have a medal chance: "She has a shot to be in the final, and if you have that, on any given day, you can get on the podium," he said.

Meanwhile Cheng, whose time was 1:59.71, felt she reacted badly to the pressure of making her Olympic bow, but hopes she'll be able to calm the nerves with two more individual events and a relay to come.

"I think I was really nervous... But I'm really happy for Siobhan, I flipped when I saw her," she said.

"I'm pretty disappointed, have been feeling pretty good and wanted at least 1:58, but I guess the first race is the one where you're really nervous.

"But finally I can say I'm an Olympian, just to race at this level is awesome