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ROAD TO TOKYO: SAMANTHA SCHULTZ (USA) REVELLING IN THE POWER TO INSPIRE



Strictly speaking, it won't be Samantha Schultz's first Olympic Games if she is selected to represent Team USA at Tokyo 2020 in 2021. But it will be the first time her name has appeared on the board.

Five years ago in Rio de Janeiro (BRA), the Colorado athlete (then Samantha Achterberg) accompanied the Isaksen sisters to the Games as alternate. She didn't get the chance to compete, but the experience of being so near and yet so far from Olympic participation intensified her burning desire to achieve this goal.

Now, having won silver at the 2019 Pan American Games in Lima (PER) to make her case for selection, she is firmly focused on preparing for what would be her debut Olympics (as a competitor) in August 2021.

In the latest Road to Tokyo interview, Schultz (USA) reveals her mixed feelings about the disrupted build-up to the Games and expresses her joy about being in a position now to inspire

future generations of pentathlete.



Q: How did it feel in 2019 when you won silver at the Pan American Games and earned a qualification place for the Tokyo Olympics?

A: It almost didn't feel real at the time, but it was an amazing feeling. I remember getting chills as I was crossing the finish line. Knowing that my hard work had come together that day was rewarding. Having my coaches and family there with me was special as they have been a huge support through this whole journey.

Q: Did you watch the Rio 2016 Olympic Games on TV? What were you thinking at that time?

A: I was in Rio and able to watch the Olympic Games in person. It was an amazing experience, but also hard since I was the alternate for qualifications. It was difficult to be there at times and not be on the field competing. It did help to fuel a fire inside me to continue to pursue my Olympic dream and passion for Pentathlon with another Olympic cycle.

Q: What would it mean for you to be selected to compete for USA at Tokyo 2020 in 2021?

A: It would be a huge honour to be selected and represent Team USA. I have put in so much hard work and overcome a lot of obstacles and injuries, and it would be the icing on the cake to compete at the Olympics. I feel that I am even more eager now that the Olympics have been postponed.

Q: What did you think when you heard the Olympics was postponed until 2021?

A: At first, I was a little relieved since all our training facilities had been shut down and we were barely allowed to leave our homes. I knew that having the Olympics in 2020 would have been difficult so in some ways it was a good thing, but it was also hard.

I was set on the Olympics happening and felt that my training was going very well. I am grateful that it was postponed, though, to allow for the safety of the athletes and the host country of Japan. It also has allowed time to train and prepare another year.



Q: How have you been keeping up your physical and mental health during the Coronavirus crisis?

A: I am grateful that I have been able to get outdoors to run and stay active. I was able to set up a good little training area in my home and make things work the best I could to keep up my physical health. I also started to work with a psychologist during COVID which has really helped my mental strength and being able to work through this time in a productive way.

I feel that there is always room for improvement, so I have tried to challenge myself in new or different ways over this past year since training has had to look a little different.

Q: What has been the most challenging part?

A: I think the most challenging part is the uncertainty with so many aspects of life right now due to COVID-19. The pandemic has challenged my ability to adapt to the changing environment with

training and life. I have tried to remain focused on the Olympic Games and the things I can control.

Q: And what positive things have you seen?

A: Over this time, I have been able to spend more time with my husband which has been wonderful. We did a lot of home projects and I learned a lot of new things along the way.

The time allowed me to go back to the basics with my training and add in some different things as well. It is always good to mix things up, and I definitely had to get creative with my training during the lockdowns.

Q: When, and why, did you take up the Modern Pentathlon?

A: I started Pentathlon in 2010. At the time I was running cross country and track, swimming, riding horses and skiing. Growing up in Colorado, my family was regularly active, and we were always doing things outdoors. I did a lot of sports including tennis, soccer, skiing, swimming, horseback riding and some hunting growing up.

A friend who I rode horses with told me about Pentathlon and my parents signed me up to do a camp in Colorado Springs at the Olympic and Paralympic Training Center. I loved the sport despite the challenges with learning how to fence.

I had planned to go to college to run, but I did not want to stop riding horses or swimming. Pentathlon was a perfect sport that allowed me to do all the things I loved and add in some new sports that would challenge me.



Q: What motivates you in training?

A: In Pentathlon, I feel there is always a challenge due to the diversity of the five events. It motivates me to try and get 1% better each day. Those little improvements and consistency add up over time.

I am challenged to keep striving for more and improving mentally and physically with all my training. I also feel that I have such a unique opportunity to pursue an athletic career and want to go out and do my best with a positive attitude.

Q: Describe yourself as an athlete in three words.

A: Determined, motivated, disciplined.

Q: Who are your role models in sport, and in life?

A: My parents and my husband, Karl, are my biggest role models and support system. They have been there through so much and they encourage me to grow in other aspects of my life.

In sport there are too many athletes to name. I am constantly being inspired by those around me not just within my sport, but all kinds of sports. I have really enjoyed getting to know athletes from all over, asking them questions to learn and grow in my athletic and personal goals.

Q: What is your ultimate ambition in Modern Pentathlon?

A: Ultimately it would be amazing to win a medal at the Olympics or a World Championships, but I believe there is so much more to the journey. Knowing that I went out there to give my best and leave a positive legacy for all women and girls in sport would be amazing.

I love to help inspire others. I feel so grateful to have the opportunity to compete in pentathlon and make so many friendships along the way. I feel that will carry forward in my future and bring joy no matter what medals I may or may not bring home.

Knowing that I showed up every day for training and competitions, worked hard and did my best with no regrets is what I want to achieve and leave behind to inspire others.

