

ZAVAROS TWINS A DETERMINED DUO HEADED TO JUNIOR WORLDS

6th FINA World Junior Swimming Championships – August 22, 2017

By Nathan Sager

Based on their individual histories, it is less than surprising that twin sisters and Oakville Aquatic Club teammates Mabel Zavaros and Rosie Zavaros will each swim for Canada at the FINA World Junior Championships in Indianapolis this week.

Despite being restricted in training due to injury, Rosie put down sub-2:15 swims in 200-metre backstroke at Canadian Swimming Trials in April to earn her spot on the team. Meanwhile, coach Sean Baker calls her sister “Stable Mabel” for her even-keel approach to training. Mabel demonstrated she was junior worlds-worthy with top-four finishes in 100-metre butterfly (fourth, 59.60 seconds) and 200-m fly (third, 2:13.59) during the Trials in April.

In recent weeks, Mabel authored the 100-200 double in butterfly at both the Canadian Junior Championships and the Canadian Swimming Championships. Needless to say, competing internationally with her twin being on Canada’s 14-swimmer junior team makes the experience that much sweeter.

“It’s going to be great because I get to experience being at the junior world level with her, it’ll be great to do together,” Mabel says.

“Going there and trying to swim fast against all these international swimmers who can go really fast, it will help me gain a different perspective for when I come back and get ready for next year ... I just want to go and swim fast and create a good environment for all of our swimmers.”

Rosie’s path to the junior worlds involved overcoming the frustration caused by dealing with a concussion, where the recovery is so much different from rehabbing an injured muscle or ligament.

“It took a while for me to accept my situation, but I’ve just come to realize that this is what I have to deal with,” says Rosie, a backstroker who is older than Mabel by two minutes. “Coming back definitely required a lot of patience from me, which is something I wasn’t used to. But this whole experience has changed me and has made stronger mentally as an athlete. At the beginning of the year I was going through a really tough time and it was hard to see me fully recovering and getting back to normal.

“I’m still on and off, but I’m mostly back to full schedule,” adds Rosie, who earned a silver medal in 100-metre backstroke at the Canadian Junior Championships in Toronto last month. “Depending on how I feel I might hold back a bit but I’m pretty consistent with my training.”

Rosie's recovery included cutting back on physical exertion and keeping the lines of communication open with Baker, who made sure she got a less crowded lane during practices.

"Rosie has kind of been the picture of the real athlete in being really patient and steadfast to get back," Baker says.

"When she first got back in the pool she was basically just floating for five or 10 minutes, that's where she was at initially when she came back. The fact that she got herself to a performance level where she could make this junior worlds team is quite frankly remarkable."

Both Baker and Mabel Zavaros espouse the theory that Rosie's effort at Trials in April was borne from being tired of missing out on making international teams, since her injury scuttled a chance to go to the 2016 Junior Pan Pacific Championships in Hawaii.

"Basically from August to February I was training like a very little amount," says Rosie. "I decided to go on our March Break training camp because I thought it was a good opportunity to get away and do a little bit of swimming. It was really good to be around the team and I swam about an hour per day. I got back feeling happier and more comfortable in the water."

"I knew I needed to go to Trials to have a chance to possibly race in the summertime. So I talked to (Burlington, Ont., Sports Medicine doctor, Dr. Paul Echlin) to try it out first in the 200 back in practice."

Swimming with no idea at all of what her time might be, Zavaros put down a time of 2:14.41 in the preliminaries. That was enough to earn a second swim, where she clocked 2:14.85 to finish 11th overall.

"It was more a pride in just how resilient this young lady was," Baker says. "It was sheer grit and determination that she was not going to miss another team. Because physiologically there really was no reason. It was sheer willpower and mindset and grit. It was just amazing to watch as her coach."

Mabel Zavaros adds, "with Rosie, her performance at Trials was all mental ... No one knew what she was capable of because she was only practising four times a week at that point. I'm really proud of her for persevering through her challenges — and she's still going through them, but she's doing a good job of handling them."

The sisters, who are the middle two of their parents Lori and Scott's four daughters, are each in Grade 12 at Iroquois Ridge High School in Oakville, Ont.

"When Rosie does well, I want to do well," Mabel Zavaros says. "She's a great training partner and the best person to race for me. One of us will give more effort if they see the other one beating her."