

Making team 'ultimate high' for Markham swimmer

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA
Sports Editor

For Garret Pule, time was of the essence when he took to the pool in the 2000 Maritime Life Olympic trials in Montreal.

At stake for the 22-year-old Markham resident was a berth on the national team if he could swim the 100-metre freestyle in a prescribed qualifying time.

And when Pule completed the race in 51:34.6 seconds, it gave him a berth alongside Rick Say, Robbie Taylor and Kyle Smerdon on the Canadian men's relay team which will compete at the Olympics in Sydney, Australia.

"It's been my dream and I'm living it right now," said Pule on clinching a spot on the team.

In making his long-awaited Olympic debut, Pule felt much of his success would not have been possible were it not for the lesson of making the most out of whatever opportunity came his way.

"For 14 years, I've dreamed of going to the Olympics and it all came down to a 50-second race. If you don't do it in that race (going to the Olympics) doesn't happen. It's a pinnacle race.

"There's lots of preparation involved, but I felt the hardest part was to keep my composure

and to do it that day.

"Most of the people who were expected to (make the Olympic team) that day did it and I did it. I trained a long time and it hits you that you have to do it that particular moment. It's the ultimate high."

Known for his past performances on the World Cup circuit in the butterfly, Pule said he wasn't disappointed in not making the Olympic team in what has been his specialty.

Taking an approach that it's not wise to concentrate all of his efforts in one event, Pule had a backup plan in mind that ultimately paid off.

"At the start of the year, I wanted to make the 100-m butterfly," he acknowledged. "But as the year went by, I wasn't feeling my 100-m butterfly stroke. I was proud that I made a decision a couple of months ago not to put all of my eggs in one basket. Instead of seeing that it would be a challenge to make the team and instead of giving up, there was an open spot in the 100-m free, so I worked extra hard on the free and it took the pressure off of me.

"To recognize that and see it and go into the trials early enough, I could make a difference in training. It all came

together. I found an alternate route to get my goal."

Entering the trials, Pule felt good about his chances in earning a berth on the national team.

"Just off what I had in training, I was very confident and still I was ecstatic to make the team. I still feel I did swim my best.

"My major goal was to stay relaxed and not think of it as an Olympic trial situation. I didn't look at who was swimming against me in the next lane.

In a trial situation, I can't control what others do. It's a waste of energy to think of anyone else. I was just concerned with myself and said, "Whatever happens, happens."

Pule conceded the Canadian team will have a challenge on its hands in its quest to claim a medal. But like the national team trials, Pule takes the approach that the team has the potential to seize the moment at hand.

"On paper, there's lots of countries that have a faster relay team than us.

"But what I like about our chances and what makes the Olympics the Olympics is that you've got to step it up that day. Swimming is separated by 10ths of 100ths of a second. All four members have to step it up. Anything can happen."

Women's softball team going in swinging

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA
Sports Editor

From being one of the youngest players on the team to one of the veterans.

That's the situation 29-year-old Colleen Thorburn-Smith is in as she prepares to make her second Olympic appearance as a member of the Canadian women's softball team in Sydney.

'It's like the tables have turned, but it feels good to have one Olympic Games under your belt. I feel that I can help others that haven't been there before.'

"It's like the tables have turned," she said this past summer when the Canadian team hosted the Three Nations Challenge tournament in Brampton. "But it feels good to have one Olympic Games under your belt. I feel that I can help others that haven't been there before."

On the field, Thorburn-Smith

will find herself in different surroundings as she was moved from playing left field in the Atlanta Games to being the starting catcher.

"It's a position I'd rather play," she revealed. "I like it because you're in control of the game."

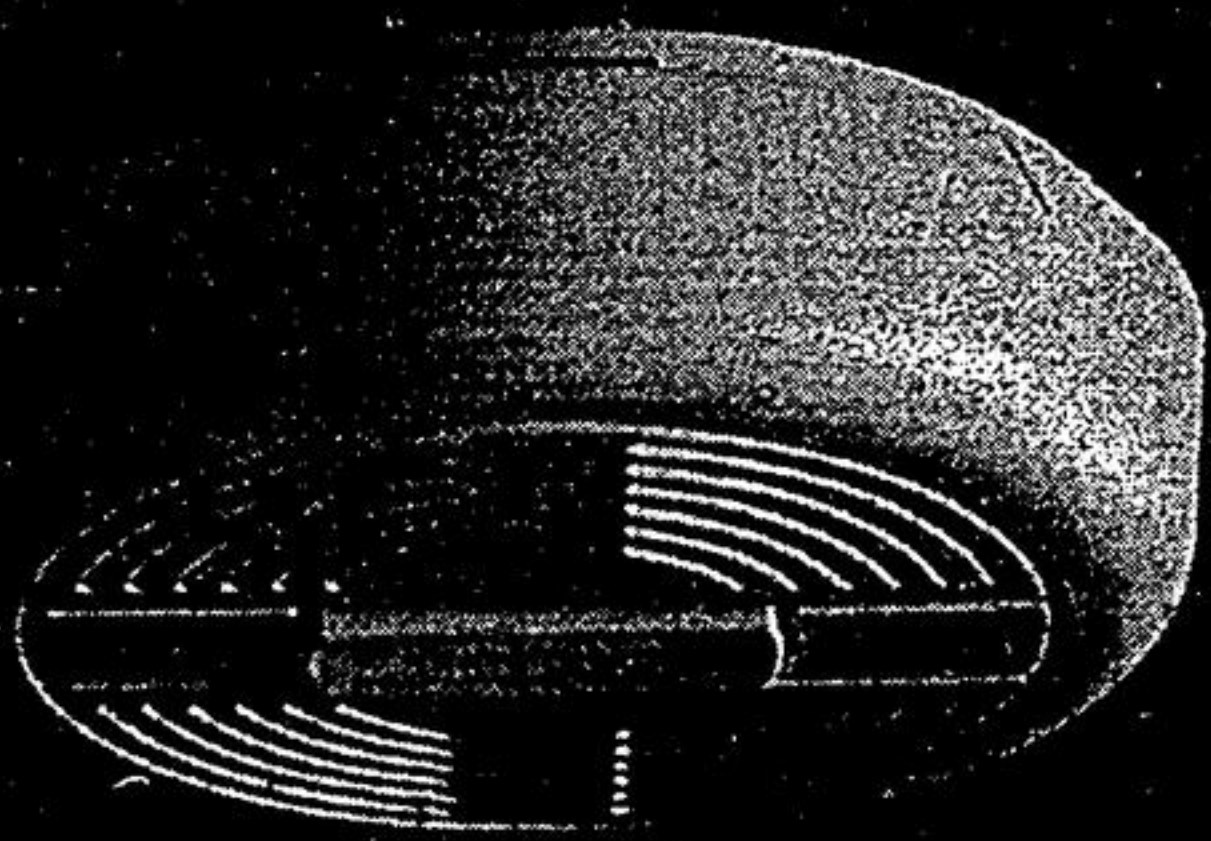
In looking at the upcoming Games, Thorburn-Smith feels this year's team can make a statement. She feels nothing short of earning a medal would be considered a success.

Thorburn-Smith predicted the biggest threat to Canada will come from either the United States, host Australia or Japan.

Currently residing in the Atlanta suburb of Woodstock, where she's an accountant by profession, Thorburn-Smith has not made any long-range commitments on her playing future.

"I haven't set a total timetable," she revealed. "I might take next year off, but it depends on what happens this year."

For the time being, the opportunity to get another crack at winning an Olympic medal keeps her in the game and adds another chapter to her softball career.



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