

Conor Dwyer 'emotionally ecstatic' to qualify for Olympics again



Conor Dwyer celebrates after finishing second in the 400-meter freestyle during the 2016 U.S. Olympic Team Trials on June 26 in Omaha, Neb. (Al Bello / Getty Images)

By **Heather Rule**
Pioneer Press

JULY 14, 2016, 10:31 AM

In the stands at the U.S. Olympic Swimming Team Trials in Omaha, Neb., 70 fans sporting "Dwyer 16" T-shirts were cheering for their guy: Conor Dwyer.

"So I knew I would have the largest crowd or fan base there," Dwyer said of his family and friends, many of whom were from the Chicagoland area. "They really helped me turn it up to the next level."

A 6-foot-5, 27-year-old originally from Winnetka, Dwyer qualified for three Olympic swimming events: the 400-meter freestyle, 200 free and 4x200 free relay in Rio.

At the trials, Dwyer finished second in the 200 free and 400 free. He finished the 400 free in 3 minutes, 44.66 seconds, coming in behind buddy Connor Jaeger. In the 200, Dwyer was 0.01 seconds out of first place with a 1:45.67.

"One-one hundredth of a second," Dwyer's coach Jon Urbanek said. "You can't even express that distance."

It's hard to wrap your mind around, Dwyer said, putting in all that work for years, and having it come down to trials.

"Because all these other professional sports, yeah, they lose a championship, but they come back three months later," said Dwyer, who attended Loyola. "For us, it's once every four years. So if you're not on top of your game at Olympic trials, then there is no Olympics for you."

Making his second Olympic games left Dwyer feeling "emotionally ecstatic."

In the 2012 Olympics, he finished fifth in the 400 free and won a gold medal in the 4x200 free relay, swimming the second leg with Ryan Lochte, Ricky Berens and Michael Phelps.

That experience will help him a lot, Dwyer said. He's looking forward to being one of the veterans, among a lot of rookies, on Team USA in Rio. His hope is to return home with more medals than before.

"I dreamed of getting to the Olympics, but winning a gold was just topping on the sundae," Dwyer said. "I got to sing the national anthem with three of my friends and teammates and look up in the stands and see the ... people that have been with me along the way."

He trains six days a week about four to five hours a day. There's also weight training and a pretty consistent high-calorie diet, too. He trained in Los Angeles and then moved to Colorado Springs, Colo., to train for 80 days at high altitude.

He's worked closely with Urbanek, a retired coach from the University of Michigan. Dwyer has the size and competitive spirit, Urbanek said.

"He's very focused," Urbanek said. "Obviously, he's very talented."

With all that training, he was "very confident" that he'd make the team for Rio. But he was still nervous. At the end of trials, he was physically and mentally drained, noting that mentally it's an event that's one of the hardest things to prepare for.

"It was kind of like I studied for the test," he said. "I shouldn't be nervous; I should ace it. But at the same time, the U.S. Olympic Trials is one of the hardest meets."

Dwyer's goal is to turn in his top performance of the year in Rio, personal-best times and get to the podium. Historically, Team USA goes faster at the Olympics than the trials, he said. He added that he listens to anything his coaches say and tries to be the best freestyler in the world.

"He's a coach's joy," Urbanek said.

Dwyer has never been to Rio, so that's one part of the excitement of the summer. The racing will take care of itself because the training is there, Dwyer said.

"There's something very special about the Olympics," he said. "It's been a very hard-working four years, and I'm excited to just enjoy the experience."

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