

U.S. Olympic Team Trials - Swimming

Wednesday, June 16, 2021

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

CHI Health Center

Allison Schmitt

200 Meter Freestyle

Paige Madden

200 Meter Freestyle

Katie McLaughlin

200 Meter Freestyle

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: I am joined this evening by the 2 through 4 finishers in the Women's 200 Meter Freestyle. The second place winner, Allison Schmitt, next to her, Paige Madden and far left we have our newest Olympian, Katie McLaughlin.

Q. Katie, this has been a long road with a lot of bumps. With your recent injury and everything else, can you put into perspective just how much this means to you and how tough even just the last year has been?

KATIE McLAUGHLIN: Honestly, not really. I can't really express how excited and grateful I feel. I think just one thing on that and I think everyone here has something in their journey that is hard for them to overcome. I don't feel like I'm different in that way, but I think that the People around me that are cheering for me every single day and believing in me what I mean having a hard time believing in myself is really who I am.

I am the most grateful for right now -- I am not here because of myself. I am here because of all the people that are around me and care about me, and I'm so grateful for them and excited for this opportunity. Yeah.

Q. Allison, this is a very young team; it's shaping up to be. As somebody who is going into her fourth Olympics, what does it mean for you to be the leader in this group?

ALLISON SCHMITT: Thank you for saying that. I'm honored to represent Team USA again, and I'm excited to meet the newest Olympians that I haven't had a chance to



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be on any teams with and have just seen around the deck. I know they're going to be great in Tokyo, and I'm excited to be part of this team.

Q. Allison, obviously you're making a statement with your sweatshirt there. I'm curious if you could tell us about that and what's inspiring it?

ALLISON SCHMITT: It says "Long Live April." It was made for my cousin's foundation. She committed suicide in 2015 and the proceeds went to her foundation.

Q. What does it say?

ALLISON SCHMITT: "Long Live April."

Q. Allison, I believe you retired after 2016. Did you ever think in the process, in the lead up to this, in 2017 and 2018, you would be sitting here as a four-time Olympian?

ALLISON SCHMITT: No, I definitely -- when I came back I had sights and goals, and this is part of the journey. I can't put into words -- the ability to represent the US at especially another Olympics is a complete honor, and I don't know if this could be predicted but it's definitely a dream come true.

Q. Paige, talk about your Virginia teammates and what it means for you and them to make the team, particularly Alex and Katie in the 200 IM?

PAIGE MADDEN: They're so great. Honestly, I was way more excited for their race than my own, and just watching them, I was jumping up and down. I knew they had something special in store. I spend every day with them, I train with them. They're really great girls. We've got so many great teammates backing us up. They're all sobbing because they're so happy for us. I think that's really, really special for me just to be a part of that.

Q. Paige and Katie, you guys get to be on a pretty special relay and get to have Allison as your teammate. She has been on relays with Dana Vollmer, Rebecca Sony, Missy Franklin and all the way back to Katie Hoffman and Natalie Coughlin. You're in this group. What does that mean to you and how much

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have you looked up to her over the years?

KATIE McLAUGHLIN: It's really exciting. If anything the best way to put it is it's a huge honor. Schmitt is such an amazing leader and cares about everyone's swimming just as much as her own swimming. I've gotten the opportunity to travel with her a ton and gotten to look up to her and she is such a steady, positive energy that is just really amazing to be around.

I feel really honored to be able to swim with her and look up to her in our races and lean on her as an amazing leader and someone who always has something positive to say with a smile on her face. It's just awesome.

PAIGE MADDEN: Yeah, it's pretty surreal, you know. I never really thought I would be in this position, especially four or five years ago. She is an amazing person. I've looked up to her for a long time. Just to be on a team with her, period, to be on a relay with her, looking back if I was 15 years old, I would be so happy to hear that. I'm happy about that today.

ALLISON SCHMITT: Thank you.

Q. Katie, how did you take the 100 Fly the other day and bounce back and come into this event and take care of business? Also, you've been on international meets, been on this 800 Free Relay a lot. How do you take that toward Tokyo and look to have a great swim there?

KATIE McLAUGHLIN: For sure. Coming into the meet my intention was no matter what happens in the 100 Fly, 200 Free the next day, so I was confident I was going to be like, whatever, you know, next event up. And by the time the semifinals came for the 200 Free, I felt after the fly not disappointed but heavier than I expected to. I definitely tried my best and am so happy that the girls that made it did. They definitely earned it and deserve it. I'm not the best candidate to do the 100 Fly, and I know that.

I just decided before semis of the 200 Free, you know what? I'm going to try my best out here, and I'm changing my attitude after that 100 Fly, leaving that behind, new meet, day one. It's been a long four days, I would say, but I'm happy to be here right now.

And I love the 800 Free Relay. There is something about stepping up on the blocks when you are not representing yourself but your team or your country that is just -- it pulls something out of you there. It's just always exciting and fun to race. I don't know, I like swinging into the water instead of doing a start, you know? That's all I got.

Q. Allison, first and foremost thank you for your advocacy when it comes to mental health awareness; it's appreciated and very needed. My question for you is: I saw at the end of the race or after the medal ceremony you had a brief embrace with Michael Phelps, and he's obviously been a great mentor to you. I'm curious what advice has he given you and what is it like for him to be here to watch you?

ALLISON SCHMITT: I mean, that was full of a lot of emotion. It's been quite the journey to get to 2021 I think for everyone, but he and Nicole and the whole family have been a huge part of that journey. So to be able to embrace them right afterwards was a very special moment. Michael is a mentor for me in the pool and out of the pool.

Q. Allison, continuing on that. You've been outspoken about mental health and taking the stigma away from a very important issue, and I'm grateful for that, speaking personally. How do you think making your fourth Olympic Team is going to elevate or give you a platform to speak out about that? Had you thought about that at all?

ALLISON SCHMITT: I haven't thought about that at all. I know for me personally, successes I have in the pool, those are going to fade. The medals go under your bed and the records are going to be broken, and at the end of the day it's what you can do with that, and I have embraced that that platform for me can be used for mental health. That's what I've chosen to do, and I'm very passionate about mental health just like I'm very passionate about the sport of swimming.

Q. Allison, I believe you were 19 when you made your first Olympic Team, and so far of the 16 people that have finished either second or sixth in your event, half of them are teenagers, so this is going to be a very young team. I was wondering if there was anything you learned from that experience and any advice you wish a younger Allison would have known?

ALLISON SCHMITT: I was 18. Just having fun with it and watching reactions and watching the girls make the team, you can just see the pride and joy that they have, not only completing but knowing that they're going to Tokyo to be Olympians, be a USA Olympian, which is a huge honor. So I'm excited to get to know them throughout these next few weeks and I'm excited to cheer them on in Tokyo.

Q. Allison, Katie alluded to it but this meet can catch you off guard and sometimes feel heavier than you might have expected or lighter than you might have expected. This being your fourth Trials do you feel like you've adapted to that, or do you feel like it catches

you off guard sometimes emotionally?

ALLISON SCHMITT: It's definitely different. It's the same -- for me I have luckily had all my Trials in Omaha, so it's kind of the same every single time, but you are at a different place in your life, you are at a different place mentally, physically and emotionally. I know it's just another box of water that we're competing in. All of us love this sport and all of us love competing.

That's why we are here. I just was enjoying the process. I had no idea what was going to happen at the end but I'm ecstatic that I'm able to go to Tokyo.

Q. Allison, we were working on -- checking this out earlier, we think there are only four other US women who have made four Olympic teams and that's Dara, Jenny Thompson, Jill Sterkel and Amanda Beard. What does it mean for you to be in that very exclusive club?

ALLISON SCHMITT: I appreciate that. I mean, that's the first time I heard that. Those names are -- to me are at the top of swimming, so to be included in those names is a complete honor. I know that there is still more work to do and we have another job after this Trial, so right now I'm focusing on that and getting ready to represent the US and hopefully bring home medals for the US.

Q. Katie, what moment did it sink in for you that you made this? Obviously there are a lot of different moments it could have, but was it when you looked up on the board? Was it when you got your medal? Can you take us through when that really sunk in and how much that meant to you? Especially after how 2016 went?

KATIE McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, for sure. I don't know if it fully has, to be honest with you. I feel like I'm riding a whole wave of emotion, right now, where sometimes it's -- I felt like when we rose up from the ground, I was like -- welled up a little bit. I was like, okay, we are in this crowd, here we go. That was definitely it. Seeing my mom, my family, she almost pulled me into the stands she was grabbing me so hard. Things like that.

Seeing my teammates and how excited they are, for me, that was special, and seeing Teri and Danny, all the people who support me. That's the biggest thing that -- that helps it set in. Everyone that comes and congratulates me, I almost start crying again, so I don't know if it's fully sunk in, but that was really not a great answer but there you go.

Q. Katie to follow up on that, I remember in 2016 you were there when Kathleen made the team in the 100

Back and just how emotional of a moment that was.

KATIE McLAUGHLIN: Yeah.

Q. Now that she is having a tough meet with her injury situation, have you had a chance to see her and what was that moment like?

KATIE McLAUGHLIN: It kind of almost mirrored her moment. After I got out of the pool, Abbey and others were right there to hug me. After I got my stuff out of my box, they were right there. We welled up with tears. It was really special. It's cool to have friends like that when things aren't necessarily going their way, they're still excited for me, and I really appreciate that and it shows what good characters they are, you know, that it's not just self-motivated.

They can see -- they can be happy for me and still be on their journey, you know? So I'm really grateful for them, and Kathleen's got another chance out here, so -- we believe in her.

Q. Allison, given the way the last three years have gone for you, what should people take away from your story and from you sitting up here tonight?

ALLISON SCHMITT: I mean, I guess age is just a number right now. I think there is a lot of naysayers about me being old. I've heard -- I mean, I've heard a lot of things, 2012 was my best, but to be able to come back and have another individual swim in the 200 is a complete honor.

I know there is more work to do before Tokyo, and I fully believe in my coaches and the training that we have done and are going to continue to do in the next two weeks.

Q. Did you ever believe that your 2012 was as good as it would get?

ALLISON SCHMITT: I didn't believe that my 2012 was my best, but I definitely have, I think, all of us, looking at social media and hearing media start believing things they say. I think it's the downfall on society when we start doing that. I think I've heard a lot of things saying that it has been my best, saying that I'm washed up, all these negative things toward myself.

But to have the support that I've had in my close-knit circle who have supported me through it all. I know I'm not here alone, and without them I wouldn't be here so I know that this journey is about all of us together.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, everyone.

