

U.S. Olympic Team Trials - Swimming

Thursday, June 17, 2021

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

CHI Health Center

Hali Flickinger

200 Meter Butterfly

Caeleb Dressel

100 Meter Freestyle

Zach Apple

100 Meter Freestyle

Blake Pieroni

100 Meter Freestyle

Brooks Curry

100 Meter Freestyle

Media Conference

Q. Hali, what was the first thing that went through your head when you turned around and saw you were in first place?

HALI FLICKINGER: I was really happy. It was another opportunity that I get to represent the U.S., so I was relieved but super happy.

Q. Caeleb, talk about that race and just starting your real part of the program so late in the meet, the start you are off to.

CAELEB DRESSEL: I'm certainly happy with that. I thought that was one of the most technically correct 100 Frees I've swum, so really happy with my approach to that. Parts of this meet that are quite unfortunate. I wish 100 Free was a little bit earlier so I could get the weight off my shoulders, but I'm fine with where we are at right now. I'm looking forward to 100 Fly tomorrow and then 50 Free after that.

Q. Hali, in the Mixed Zone you were talking about some of the coaching changes. You walked into Bob's office, and you made clear what some of your goals were and some of your struggles. Could you elaborate on what your struggles were?

HALI FLICKINGER: I just had a little too much pressure on



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my shoulder in the 200 Fly. I was carrying a lot of self-doubt every time I stepped up on the block. I made sure that Bob was aware of that when I walked into his office because it's something I wanted to hit head on. So, yeah.

Q. Caeleb, you are not someone who seeks the spotlight, yet after that 100 Freestyle you were exorting the crowd and, you know, like an extroverted showman. What was going on there?

CAELEB DRESSEL: I pick and choose when I like to have my moments. I've always said if you win your heat, that heat is yours. You can do what you like, so I was excited. There was a lot of emotion wrapped up in that. This meet was prolonged a year. It was more than I just won a 100 Freestyle. There was a lot of emotion in this. All the struggles through quarantine, finding pools to train at, all of that packed into one race. It wasn't just a 100 free for me. There was a lot going on.

A lot of outside pressure, which I've gotten better and better at ignoring. So it's not just what you see. I was excited. I wanted to share that with the crowd. Right now I'm kinda over the spotlight again, but for that moment I wanted to have it and share that with the people in the stadium. It was fun. It was fun celebrating with them, and it was a fun race with these boys. That was an ecstatic 100 Free, and I really enjoyed doing that with them.

Q. Zach, I believe this is your first individual swim at an Olympics or World's. What does that mean to you? You've been a relay stalwart, but this is the first chance on your own?

ZACH APPLE: For sure. Coming into the meet that was definitely on my mind, something I wanted to do. Five years ago I was here, and I think I finished mid-30s in the 100, 200 and 50 Free, all three of them. I sat at the end of the meet and watched them name the team, and I didn't really like how it felt sitting in the stands watching the team get paraded around. That next year kind of, that was the focus. About five months after Trials, I changed the lock screen on my phone to say, "Tokyo 2020" and so it's been a long time coming. It hasn't just been the past year, the past 18 months or anything like that; it's been a long time coming, so I'm really excited.

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Q. Hali, how much has Regan Smith improved in the 200 Fly over the past couple of years, and was that a fun race tonight to have her set the pace and to reel her in and catch her?

HALI FLICKINGER: Yeah, it's always fun to race Regan. We get to do it at almost every Pro swim. I love to be able to pace myself with other people. People swim that race so differently, so it's nice to have someone who goes out like Regan does and then just kinda see what happens in the race. So, yeah, it just makes the races fun to have different strategies each time you swim them.

Q. Brooks and Blake, there is so much history around the 4-by-100 relay. We all know what happened in 2008 and 2016 and just what does it mean that you are going to be a part of it, whether that's in the prelims or in the final? What does it mean to be sitting there in Olympians in this historic relay for the US?

BROOKS CURRY: It's an amazing feeling. It's a huge honor to be up here with these guys, and I'm just super excited to be a part of the this, and how the meet has gone so far, I'm really happy with it. I had a great swim tonight. I'm excited to be going to Tokyo with these guys. It's amazing.

BLAKE PIERONI: Yeah. I mean, there is a huge tradition I think for all US relays, really, but I don't know, the 4-by-100, people think it's one of the most exciting relays, and I think so, too. I remember being at the Olympics last time and being in the stands, because I only swam in prelims, and I remembered Michael being on the final, and I was getting the times and everything. He was like, "What did I split?" And I was like, "I think you went 47.0 or something like that," and he was super pumped.

I remember how -- actually every -- at World's, at the Olympics, every time we win that relay it doesn't get old, and I think we have a great shot to win it again.

Q. Blake, segueing off that, no one has had to wait five years to make another Olympic Team before. How are you changed since 2016 as a swimmer? Because I think you said in a way that almost jump-started your elite career?

BLAKE PIERONI: Yeah, I hate waiting. Honestly, I hate waiting four years. I think the anticipation and the waiting is probably the worst part for me. I wish -- I mean if the Olympics were every two years, I think that would be awesome. How it's changed me? After making the team it ignited just a huge fire in me in that -- maybe the most motivated and just adrenaline-packed practices I have ever

had were just in the few weeks after making the team. I was so excited.

I mean, honestly, it's been tough with COVID. I would be lying if I said I was as filled with fire and motivation this time as I was last time. So it's just been tough, and that's how it's changed me.

Q. Hali, can you talk a little bit about your versatility? We talk about it a lot in swimming. You do a lot of events in a lot of different kinds of meets. How validating was the 400 IM for you in that and how much did that play a role training for that event in helping take the pressure off the 200 Fly?

HALI FLICKINGER: It helped a lot. When I go to practice, every day there is not just one focus on the 200 Fly, which like I said earlier was something that I talked to Bob about right away. So he just made sure that whatever we did, it didn't have to be fly, that I was working hard and just happened to be the fly and what was put together. I'm real excited.

Q. (No microphone.)

HALI FLICKINGER: No, it didn't. Bob and I talked about it, and after Mission, going a best time there, I was really shocked there, but I knew what I was doing in practice and I knew what was possible, so I was hoping to be there. I wasn't sure, but I'm glad that it all came together.

Q. Hali, going back to the self-doubt, because I think a lot of people struggle with self-doubt, what did Bob do or the team do to help you get over that? Can you share that with your fans?

HALI FLICKINGER: I think the first part is just the group of girls that I'm training with, not just girls, we train combined. They all just helped me take my mind away from what was going on. We got an extra year to spend together. ASU took a year off of college swimming, so I got to spend every day with them. We were all on the same schedule. I just was able to spend so much time with them, which I think really helped relieve my mind, because I was just having fun and enjoying it. Yeah.

Q. Brooks, I just realized you didn't have the Wave II cut until just a bit ago, to go from where you were a year ago and now to fourth place in the 100 Free, that celebration you had seemed like it meant a lot to you.

BROOKS CURRY: I had the Wave II cut at a Diamond meet, but it be didn't count, so I had to get it again, so it was more recent when I got it. I was all in on that 100 Free, and it meant so much that it worked out the way I

wanted it to.

Q. Caeleb, can you talk about every Trials we have -- look at the plethora of different stories here right now, just what is it like seeing so many different kinds of stories from unexpected to upsets and, you know, finally validation for some people? There is no other meet like it. What is it like for you to watch that for other people?

CAELEB DRESSEL: This meet is where dreams come true and it's also where dreams come to die. It's a sad reality the amount of people I have seen walking down from the deck with tears in their eyes. It is unfortunate. It's one part of the meet that, it sucks. It breaks my heart to see people you swam on teams with not make a team, but that's also my favorite part about making national teams like this is seeing the new faces, seeing these new kids step up.

My favorite part about any national team championship I've been on is training camp. I'm very much looking forward to that, really becoming Team USA. That's what makes Team USA so special, whenever we are shipped off to -- I say it like it's a bad thing. Whenever we are flying over to Hawaii, that's when we are becoming Team USA.

And that's my favorite part about this meet. You have people from different backgrounds, different ages, different club teams all around America, and we are becoming one team. So right now, we might not realize it, but us four, five, are teammates right now. So we're going to grow, we're going to make that bond even stronger in Hawaii, and once we go off to Tokyo, we will get ready to take care of business as a team.

Q. Caeleb, Bobby Finke said earlier he was hoping maybe the Gators can win all Freestyle events. Is that something you guys talked about or is that like, no it just happened?

CAELEB DRESSEL: Yeah. No, totally talked about it. No, we didn't talk about it at all. No, those young guys are awesome. I got a good relationship with both Kieran and Bobby. I texted them before the meet. I'm not going to tell you what I said but they're special guys. I thought Bobby had a great swim. Kieran has been killing the meet so far. I look up to both those guys. I don't care if they're younger than me, what they brought to the university. I've learned things from both of them, so we'll keep the ball rolling. I'm not guaranteed any wins or anything like that, sweeping the freestyle events. I've got a butterfly event to swim tomorrow so I'm focused on that.

Q. Caeleb, I don't know if you can answer for

everybody, and you see where this question is going -- France, from my accent, of course. You talked about the history of the relay, of course, and how much is France part, and how much can you be part of history this year as well?

CAELEB DRESSEL: I think any country we go up against we're not going to rule out. There are eight lanes for a reason. We're going to do our part to take care of what we can control. Right now we have the four fastest guys at this meet, so we're going to go into Tokyo with some confidence, and we are going to go take care of business. Not guaranteeing anything, but I think the four of us can do something special and we're going to go in with the mindset that we're going to take care of business. That's what we have always done, I think, since the Olympics have started. So, yeah, we know France is there, Australians, Russians, Brazilians. There are plenty of relays with plenty of talent that we're not going to rule out anybody.

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