

U.S. Olympic Team Trials - Swimming

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Omaha, Nebraska, USA

CHI Health Center

Simone Manuel

100 Meter Freestyle

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We have 2016 Olympian Simone Manuel who just swam a 54.17 in the Women's 100 Meter Free.

Q. Simone, first of all thank you for coming in, really appreciate that. Could you describe what happened, and maybe your emotions now knowing that after winning the gold in Rio you're not going to have a chance in the final?

SIMONE MANUEL: Yeah. I mean, it's definitely hard for me to be sitting up here. I feel like I want to share my story, what I've been through this past year, especially the past couple months. It has not been easy by any stretch.

I knew that every 100 or every race that I was going to have at this meet was going to be more of a challenge than it has been in the past.

I think we saw what happened, I placed 9th. I haven't quite processed it completely, but the one thing I have processed is that I am proud of myself, and I did everything I possibly could have done to set myself up to be my very best at this meet, and that 54 -- I don't even know what the time was, was as best as I could be today and in this moment.

That's a tough pill to swallow, but I think what makes it easier to swallow is I simply -- I really went out there, and I did my best.

Q. Can you articulate what you have been through and how tough it was to have even gotten here?

SIMONE MANUEL: About 11 weeks or so, I was diagnosed with OTS, Overtraining Syndrome. I was feeling pretty bad the week before the San Antonio Pro Swim Series in March and went to the doctor after that competition, and that's when I was diagnosed. The meet was in San Antonio. I went to a doctor in Houston because



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I went to visit my family for a little bit.

I went back to Stanford and modified my training as much as I possibly could while staying in the water. After about, I believe, two weeks of modified training, I wasn't seeing any progress with my performance in the pool; it actually was declining.

From that moment, with the doctors and kind of Greg's recommendation, the end of March, I took three weeks off, completely out of the pool. I can't remember the exact date, but I do remember my first date back training was April 17th. It was kind of one of those bittersweet moments where my body, like, wasn't doing what I knew it was capable of. I had moments where I didn't even want to go to the pool because I knew it was going to be bad. It was one of those moments where I felt relief because I was like, this is what I need to even get to Olympic Trials, but it also was hard because 11 weeks out from Olympic Trials you're taking three weeks out of the water. I wasn't doing any exercise, I went home and spent time with my family.

It was an uphill climb. Once I got back in the water some days were good, some days weren't great. I could go on and on but to sit here and even do what I did and to be at this meet is something that I can't take lightly.

Q. Simone, for the layman who may not be familiar with this, is it something that you had heard of before? Is it common in swimming? Do you know anybody who has dealt with this type of thing?

SIMONE MANUEL: I don't know. I don't know -- I could assume it's probably common in swimming and we just don't know it. As much as swimmers train and push their bodies, of course I'm bias but swimming is definitely I think one of the hardest sports, because you have to be in the water every day. There is no real off-season. You are continually pushing your body in and out of the water to maximize your potential.

No, it was nothing I had ever heard of.

My mom did a lot of research after I went to the doctor, and just the symptoms that I told the doctor and that I had told my mom before I went to the doctor was definitely signs of Overtraining Syndrome.

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I guess I should elaborate on that. I guess the first sign was increased heart rate at rest but also in training, like simple sets that I could do at a lower heart rate, my heart rate spiked to something higher. Insomnia, depression, anxiety, sore muscles, like walking up the stairs to the pool, I was gassed. Workouts that seemed to be easier seemed to be really hard.

The effort that I would give on, say, a second 50 in the 100 was, I mean, kind of like the effort I gave today, I was trying really hard, but the best my body could give me was a 54. It was definitely discouraging. I think there is the physical component but on top of that is the mental component of, like I said, I was going to practice, and I didn't want to be there because I knew I wasn't at my best. That's hard, because I love this sport! That was hard for me to grasp during that time.

Q. Simone, can you tell us how you're feeling physically now? How is everything working, Soto speak?

SIMONE MANUEL: I don't know. I think things still feel hard. I went through the race today, the first 50, like my speed doesn't seem to be there with the effort that I'm trying. I think it's hard to taper coming off of three weeks not training. I had weeks where I would single on Monday, double on Tuesday, off on Wednesday, single on Thursday, off on Friday and single on Saturday. And, I mean, if you know swimming, that's not a lot to be in the water, but it was just whatever I could do to keep my body and my recovery as high as possible while staying in the water.

Like I said, it was hard. I'm a hard worker. I don't like getting out of practice early, I don't like missing practice. So to navigate all of that while still thinking about Olympic Trials was hard.

Q. Simone, how are you looking at the 50 at this point?

SIMONE MANUEL: I'm going to go for it. I don't think that I would have showed up to Trials if I didn't feel like I had any reason to be here. My faith is extremely important to me, and I'm confident that God wouldn't put anymore on me than I can bear. I'm just hopeful.

Q. Given how tough you are on yourself, is it almost a huge thing for you to be able to say, I'm proud of myself, what I've done here is a big step for me?

SIMONE MANUEL: Absolutely. I'm someone where I accomplish something, I'm always looking forward to the

next thing. I don't feel like sometimes I always sit back and appreciate what I have done. This was the first time I think I have shown up to a meet and before I dove in to do a race I was proud of myself, and I think that's a big step. I think that -- I hope that inspires more athletes to feel that way.

I don't think I'm alone in feeling that. I feel like we're not proud of ourselves until we accomplish something so great. I've done it. I'm an Olympic champion, so I know there is more there. Like I said, it's still a tough pill to swallow but that's what is giving me peace. Like I said, I know I did everything I possibly could to even be here, and that makes me proud, because I continued to stay strong during this process even when there are times when I wanted to give up.

Q. Simone, thank you for your courage for being here. There are going to be a lot of people tonight hearing about this and a lot of kids. You're a role model to so many and such an accomplished champion. When you think about March, that you started to feel this way, was this coming on for a few months? When did you notice it? And what kind of message is there for you to send out -- and maybe the physical part but the mental part, as you know, Naomi Osaka has spoken about this, so many other athletes, Michael, Allison, I'm just curious what your voice is on the mental -- you've talked a bit about that, but again, before March when did you feel this coming on, and then second part, and thank you so much, is the mental part and maybe your voice there and what an important part that is. Thank you.

SIMONE MANUEL: Yeah, I think it kind of started a little bit in January. I think it was something I didn't quite notice until my body completely crashed. It's kind of like you do a practice and you get through 85% of it and then like the last 15 diminish, and I think that it may be like one day a week, not a lot of days. Then the next week I would swim really well, and then the week after that it may have been two practices and then swim really well, and the week after that it may have been one.

So it wasn't something that I think was easy to spot until March, and you could kind of look back at those moments where it started, this practice or maybe this week or so forth. Just from a mental perspective, it's hard to put into words because during this process I definitely was depressed. I isolated myself from my family. My mom would ask me questions on the phone, and I would snap at her in ways that I typically wouldn't. I had a hard time eating at times.

So I think the only way I got through it was you know,

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talking to my loved ones and being surrounded by the support that they could give me, talking to my sports psychologist, openly talking to Greg and Tracy about what I was feeling after each practice, or if I had a down day.

But I also think from the perspective of, you know, going after your dreams, I have had a lot of moments where if your dream is important to you, you fight for it, but this definitely was my biggest fight. Like I said, I hope that people can be proud of themselves with the work that they put in before they even see their accomplishments come to fruition.

Maybe it didn't happen today, but this isn't the last time you're going to see me, and this isn't the last time I'm going to do something great in the pool; I'm confident in that.

Q. Simone, thank you. What you described has some similarities, I know it's not the same, but it sounds kind of similar to what Ella Eastin shared. Did you guys talk about what she was going through as well?

SIMONE MANUEL: No, we didn't. When Ella was training, I did know what she was going through and I tried to offer as much advice as I could from an outsider's perspective. I don't want to share the details of Ella's experience. I don't think she has completely shared her story, and just to be honest, it wasn't something I talked about with her, for reasons that she would know and I know, but, like I said, I don't want to share that part of her story.

Q. I heard what you said about this isn't the last time. What do the doctors tell you about kind of a long-term prognosis on this type of condition, and could you eventually get past it, regardless of what happens here? Could you get past it in the future and come back and be your old self again?

SIMONE MANUEL: Yeah, I think in some days I kinda did. I went to Austin and swam a 53.8, and two days before that I did a broken 100 and I swam a 55.4, so to go a 53.8 after I had only been in the water 24 days, I think it does show that my body recovered and I can do it. But, yeah, I had the conversation with the doctor when he suggested taking -- he and Greg suggested taking three weeks off.

I couldn't really take more than that, and I couldn't really take less than that, so that's where we are today, but he said that pending I make the Olympic Team, I have to take a couple of months off to really just let my body rest.

I think I will be fine. I think that I will continue to follow doctor's orders and take it slow getting back into the pool whenever that happens. Yeah.

Q. Obviously thank you, and we wish you the best. You mentioned a sports psychologist. I was wondering if you want to share it, working with a therapist, and also is it so much about going back to your old self or finding a new self?

SIMONE MANUEL: I think -- what about the therapist did you want to know?

Q. Just if it's a process that you are working on right now, and if it's so much going back to your old self or finding a new self?

SIMONE MANUEL: Yeah, I haven't talked to my therapist today. I'm sure I will reach out to him or he will reach out to me today. He is always watching my swimming and offering me words of encouragement as I get ready for the 50 Free. I don't think that -- I'm 24 years old, I'm about to be 25. I'm not the same swimmer that I was last year or in 2016. I think as people are always evolving and we are always, you know, striving for something better, I think that whether that is an accomplishment or growing into who you want to be, your values, what's important to you, that makes you "new."

So I think sitting here today I'm a new Simone than I was in 2019, just with how I think, how I feel, what's important to me, how I want to inspire others. This is just another way I want to inspire others, taking care of your body, focusing on mental health, along with obviously the diversity component. I think that each year I'm always learning and growing in and out of the sport, and I'm excited. I love who I'm becoming. I think that's why I was able to walk out of the pool and have my head held up was, because I did my best and I'm proud of it.

Q. Simone, you hold your cards so close to your vest. You could have sat up here last Saturday and said, in effect, I'm dealing with this and lowered everyone's expectations. What kept you from doing that?

SIMONE MANUEL: Like I said, my faith is extremely important to me, so I think I was having a lot of moments where I was just telling myself to believe, to believe in my abilities and my capabilities to go out there and race. And, of course, you know in the back of your head there is a realistic voice saying okay but you've only been in the water for eight weeks, and you are about to swim at Olympic Trials. But I think I didn't want people to feel sorry for me. I still don't want them to feel sorry for me now.

I'm confident that the path that God has me on is the path that I'm supposed to be on, and that's nothing for other people to feel sorry about; it's not even anything for me to feel sorry about. I find comfort in that. It's hard to find

comfort in that, but I think that's definitely what faith is. Comfort in the things that you can't see and that you don't know. That's kind of the perspective that I had going into the 100 Free was, who knows. I could go out there and break a world record! Like, I just was going to go out there and do my best, and my best could have been really good, and unfortunately it wasn't, but I think that's one of the reasons why I didn't talk about it.

Q. Simone, thank you for sharing this. I know it's hard. I might be off base here but wondering how much the pandemic played into it without the usual tapering for big meets, and I think all of us with lock down became myopic in what -- I got too focused in my own work and got burned out. I'm wondering if that played a part in this?

SIMONE MANUEL: I think it could be. I haven't been on social media, so I don't know what the press has been talking about, but I think for all of us swimmers to be focusing on the Olympics for a fifth year mentally is just hard. I think it's hard; that's an understatement, to push that back, and obviously it was pushed back for important reasons, but to focus on a goal like that for five years instead of four is draining.

You are motivated still to go for it because it's your dream, but also at the same time it's like you're trudging along at times, and I know that -- I don't want to speak for every swimmer, but I know everybody here was excited to be here and swim. So I think it could have played a part in it. I do think that being a black person in America played a part in it. This last year for the black community has been brutal, and I can't say that that wasn't something that I saw. It's not something I can ignore. It was just another factor that can influence you mentally in a draining way.

So I think those are kind of two things that kind of played into a little bit of the overtraining in some ways.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, everyone.

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