



Stanford star Maya DiRado could swim with the best in Summer Olympics

By: [Paul Gackle](#) | 04/29/12 8:42 PM

Special To The SF Examiner

If there's an ideal psychological makeup for an Olympic athlete, the prototype might be a sophomore swimmer making waves at Stanford.

Maya DiRado, 19, is on the short list of contenders vying to represent the United States at the Olympics this summer in the women's 200- and 400-meter individual medleys and the 200-meter backstroke. The Santa Rosa native is on the bubble, but her coach thinks she could eventually join Jenny Thompson, Summer Sanders and Janet Evans on Stanford's list of decorated Olympic swimmers.

"If it's not this time, Maya will be someone who, in the next four years, America is going to look at and say, she has the chance to be our next big thing," Cardinal coach Lea Maurer said.

At 15, DiRado qualified for the 2008 U.S. Olympic trials, but she fell short of landing a trip to Beijing. A year later, she broke 11-time Olympic medalist Natalie Coughlin's state high school record in the 200 IM as a junior at Santa Rosa's Maria Carrillo High School. By graduation, she was a 10-time All-American and a four-time state champion.

DiRado made an immediate splash at Stanford last year, winning the Pac-10 Freshmen of the Year award, while being named a five-time All-American.

As a sophomore, she continued to blossom, finishing second in the 200 backstroke, third in the 200 IM and fourth in the 400 IM at the NCAA championships.

Despite her natural talents, Santa Rosa Neptunes coach Dan Greaves said DiRado's mental approach is what separates her from the pack.

"They all have the same physical attributes at that level," he said. "It's who has the mind to handle what's coming at you."

One secret to DiRado's success is that she embraces the struggle. She loves to train, work out and push the limits of her abilities.

"When I get up on the block, there's nothing I can do anymore," she said. "I just shut off my brain and let it happen."

Last summer, she was disqualified from the 200 IM at the World University Games on an ambiguous call. While her coaches huffed and puffed, DiRado shook it off and took gold in the 400



GETTY IMAGES FILE PHOTO

Stanford's Maya DiRado a possible contender for the U.S. Olympic Swim team this summer.

IM the next day.

“All the coaches called me and said, ‘Can you clone her?’” Maurer said.

To qualify for London, DiRado will need to finish top two in one of her swims at the Olympic trials in Omaha, Neb., this June. That would mean leap-frogging one of the favorites. Either way, she’ll do her best.

“I’m going to try to be relaxed and put myself in a position to go best time,” she said. “If not, it’s not the end of my swimming career.”

Olympic trials

WHEN: June 25-July 2

WHERE: CenturyLink Center, Omaha, Neb.

INFO: www.usaswimming.org

URL: <http://www.sfexaminer.com/sports/college/2012/04/stanford-star-maya-dirado-could-swim-best-summer-olympics>