

CAMPBELL WANTS RIO GOLD, NOT RECORDS, SAYS COACH

MELBOURNE: The 100 metres freestyle world record Cate Campbell set earlier this month is a testament to her class and determination but the Australian will not chase the time in pursuit of gold at the Rio Olympics, according to her long-serving coach.

Campbell's 52.06-second swim at the Brisbane Grand Prix on July 2 shaved just one one-hundredth of a second off Britta Steffen's seven-year-old mark but landed a heavy psychological blow to her rivals, including her world champion sister Bronte.

None have come close to German Steffen's time, which was set in a now-banned synthetic suit in 2009.

Bronte Campbell is a distant second in the world rankings, her best time of the year more than half a second slower than her older sister's at 52.58 seconds.

Simon Cusack, mentor to both Campbell sisters, was bursting with pride after Cate tore up the Brisbane

Aquatic Centre but was also quick to remind her that the world record would mean little on the starting block at Rio.

"Whilst it's really nice to have the mark, it's no guarantee of what's going to happen at the Games," the Brisbane-based 39-year-old told Reuters.

"Winning a gold medal comes down to one moment in time and not only do you need great preparation, you do sometimes need a little bit of luck on your side," he added.

"When you're living in an Olympic village with people coming from all corners of the globe and eating out of the same food hall you get exposed to a lot of viruses and bacteria.

"So that's why winning a gold at the Olympics is such a tough thing and very often they're not won in world record time. So I've expressed that to Cate," Cusack said. "She's very, very happy with having that world mark but it doesn't change anything from here on in."

The older Campbell sibling is unlikely to need further reminders of how luck can change the game when she appears at her third Olympics.

The 24-year-old won bronzes in the 50m freestyle and 4x100m relay on her 2008 Games debut in Beijing before losing years to illnesses including glandular fever and post-viral fatigue.

At her second Olympics in London, she won gold in the 4x100m freestyle relay but her individual campaign was wrecked by about of pancreatitis.

When fully fit, the 2013 world champion has shown she has no peer, however, as witnessed by her breathtaking return to form this year.

THROWN DOWN

The record has inevitably been viewed as a gauntlet thrown down, but Cusack said it came by coincidence, not design. "It was just an organic thing," he said. "I never really give her a time to

chase, it's more of a process but sometimes (swimmers) do get it in their head to chase a time and they generally overcook the first 50 in a 100-metre race.

"She's really learnt just to rely on 'automaticity' which is just created by race training sets," he added. "She just let it flow out there and it came together, so it was just fantastic." Cusack said he felt Campbell, who like 22-year-old Bronte was born in Malawi, could raise her pace again. "I don't think the project's ever finished," he said.

"She's obviously probably somewhere towards the peak of her career but it depends on how long she's willing to stay in it. Her starts and turns are consistently improving and that's been a gradual process. So, I'd like to think that she can get faster."

Campbell joins an illustrious club of Australians to have held the world record in the blue riband event, including four-times Olympic champion Dawn

Fraser and Jodie Henry, who won gold in Athens in 2004.

Queenslander Libby Trickett, another four-times Olympic champion, held the record three times from 2004-09 before Steffen took it in a synthetic suit and improved her mark at the 2009 world championships in Rome.

A number of records set during the controversial super-suit era remain. "I was there in Rome on the day when Steffen set the record and I remember thinking back then, 'this one is going to stand for a while.' And it did," Cusack said.

"For the super-suit era, the sooner it can be erased, the better. It was just a tumultuous time in swimming history and what it did at the time was it made a bit of a joke out of world record standards. It really discriminated against the ones who set the previous ones in the old lycra costumes," he added.

"So it's a great thing that Cate's been able to erase that mark." —Reuters

FAST SWIMMERS MAKE FAST POOLS, BUT 'SCIENCE' LENDS A HAND

LONDON: To those who dip into swimming only when the Olympic Games come around, it may seem odd to hear a pool described as 'fast' when it looks much like any other large rectangle filled with water.

And while coaches hammer into their young charges that fast swimmers make fast pools, like swimmers, some pools are faster than others and even Michael Phelps goes quicker with the application of science. In 2013, after British swimmers had flopped at the London Games and that year's world championships, head coach Bill Furniss suggested Sheffield's Ponds Forge Olympic standard pool was hampering their development because it was too fast. Cue jokey headlines suggesting swimmers were training in the "wrong kind of water"—an echo of the "wrong kind of snow/rain/sunshine" excuses familiar to downtrodden commuters when Britain's weather halts the trains.

At the international level, however, the biggest waves are the ones given by the swimmers to the crowd as they climb out. Rio's new 50-metre Olympic pool, where records may be set as dreams and duels play out, should stand out like a gleaming Ferrari among functional family runabouts.

The technology in such a pool, from energy-absorbing lane dividers and wave-swallowing drainage to the depth and temperature, is all designed to help the world's best swimmers go faster than ever.

"Years and years ago, when pools had gutters on the side and walls, if you were on the outside lane then the waves were splashing back and hitting you," Britain's 4x100 mixed-medley world gold medalist Chris Walker-Hebborn told Reuters at an Adidas event.

"That was what I perceived as a slow pool back then. Everything we race in now, it (the water) runs off the edge into a drain so you are at no more disadvantage being

in lane eight than you are in lane four, other than not being in the middle of the race."

Beijing's 'Water Cube' was dubbed the fastest pool in the world when 25 world records were broken at the 2008 Olympics and various factors contributed to that.

The now-banned drag-reducing high-tech suits, with Phelps using Speedo's LZR bodysuit to win eight golds, were a huge factor but the pool was also wider and significantly deeper than the one used in Athens in 2004.

Unlike Athens, it was also indoors. That uniform three metre depth, now recommended by world body FINA and considered the norm since Beijing, makes the water more buoyant and less turbulent. The temperature of the water—all 3.7 million litres of it is kept between 25 and 28 degrees Celsius. Too warm, and the body can over-relax. Too cold, and muscles may tighten.

The Rio Aquatics Stadium, a temporary structure, has had 15,000 strategically positioned holes drilled into it as part of a natural ventilation system.

The lighting, the crowd, the acoustics also all help create an atmosphere that crackles with anticipation and plays into the mental side. In Rio, the front-row seats will be just 10 metres from the action.

British swimmer Adam Peaty, who set a 100 metres breaststroke world record of 57.92 seconds in London last year, said the psychological factor of swimmers going fast because they know the pool is state-of-the-art was not to be underestimated.

"It's more of an idea than a thing; The idea of performing at an Olympics and being one of the best in the world, and that pool is the idea," Peaty said after this year's European championships.

"It sounds very metaphorical, but every time I see that (London) pool I just want to be the best in the world." —Reuters



LONDON: Usain Bolt of Jamaica poses for photographers after he won the men's 200 meter race during the Diamond League anniversary games at The Stadium, in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in London, Friday. — AP

BOLT WINS BUT HURDLER HARRISON TAKES THE GLORY

LONDON: Usain Bolt delivered on his top billing by winning the 200 metres at the London Diamond League on Friday but the Jamaican was upstaged for once as American sprint hurdler Kendra Harrison broke one of the oldest world records in the book.

Bolt, running his first 200 metres race for a year in his last outing on the track before the Olympics, struggled for his usual rhythm as he laboured to victory in 19.89 seconds.

However, having pulled out of the Jamaican trials last month with a hamstring strain, he was delighted to get through Friday's race uninjured and can now go away and fine-tune for his attempt at the triple-triple of 100m, 200m and 4x100m relay golds in Rio.

Harrison, however, will be watching the Games on TV having finished sixth in the 100m hurdles at the US trials after breaking the national record in May. She earned some consolation—as well as a \$50,000 bonus—on Friday with a stunning world record.

After delivering a silky smooth performance to win, the clock initially showed a modest 12.58 seconds. However, it was quickly corrected to 12.20, one hundredth of a second faster than the mark set by Bulgaria's Yordanka Donkova in 1988—four years before Harrison was born.

Brianna Rollins (12.57), Kristi Castlin (12.59) and Ali Nia (12.63), all Rio-bound after finishing 1-2-3 in the US trials, finished in the same order, behind Harrison on Friday.

VENGEANCE

"I wanted to come out here with a vengeance to show that even though I won't be going to the Olympics I had to give it all I had," said Harrison, who collapsed to the track in tears when she saw the revised time. There was a more muted celebration for Bolt, who nevertheless delighted the crowd by winning then spending his usual remarkable amount of time signing autographs, posing for photos and giving endless media interviews.

After a steady start he led halfway round the bend, but only just. As he hit the straight and the crowd expected the sort of surge that brought him three Olympic golds on the same track four years ago, it didn't happen.

Rocking noticeably, he had to work all the way to the line for a time considerably shy of American LaShawn Merritt's season-leading 19.74. Panama's Edward Alonzo was second in 20.04 with Briton Adam Gemili third in 20.07.

"I tried to hold my form. I'm not fully in shape and I don't think I executed well—I need more work," said Bolt, who turns 30 next month.

"I don't want to see it again. I wasn't that impressed," he added of his performance. "But I'm feeling good and happy I could run and finish the race without any injuries." Shaunae Miller of the Bahamas will also head to Rio in confident mood after posting a world-leading 49.55 to win the women's 400 metres, setting up a mouth-watering one-lap showdown with Allyson Felix.

There was plenty to cheer for the home fans in the Olympic Stadium now decked out in the claret and blue of its new tenants, West Ham United soccer club.

Britain's women's 4x100m relay team opened

proceedings by triumphing in a national record 41.82 seconds, the fastest time in the world this year. Laura Muir also channelled the spirit of 2012's "Super Saturday" when the crowd roared her home in a gutsy front-running victory in the women's 1500m for a huge personal best and another British record of 3:57.49—knocking

Olympic champion Kelly Holmes off top spot.

Frenchman Jimmy Vicaut won a disappointing 100 metres final in 10.02, having been the only man to dip under 10 seconds with a 9.96 in the heats. The action continued yesterday, with the day's highlight being the 5,000m, featuring home favourite Mo Farah. — Reuters

PHELPS HOPING RIO SWANSONG HITS THE RIGHT NOTES

TORONTO: Having ended his career once in London on what he considered a sour note, Michael Phelps enters the Rio de Janeiro Olympics pool for his second swansong determined to bow out on his own terms.

Inspired, motivated and sober, Phelps heads to Rio with the chance to add to his record total of 22 medals and to pen the happy ending he feels he denied himself four years earlier. At the 2012 London Olympics, which he also declared would be his last, Phelps won four gold and six medals but walked away filled with the regret that he simply went through the motions rather than embracing the moment.

"Going into '12, I just didn't want to do it," the 31-year-old said at the U.S. Olympic swim trials in Nebraska last month. "I tried to fake it. I wanted to get in and out as fast as I could and really wanted nothing to do with it."

"That haunted me for a while. I came back because I wanted to. I wanted to do this for me. I'm enjoying the moment and I'm embracing the moment and taking it one step at a time. "Being able to fall in love with the sport again is something that I've always wanted to do again and I

did it on my terms." Like many athletes, when his career finished, Phelps appeared lost and unprepared. He talked of becoming a professional golfer but eventually found himself testing the waters of a swimming comeback.

That return was interrupted by a second drunk driving arrest in 2014 and a stint in rehab, which laid the foundation for his transformation from party boy to family man. He reconnected with his estranged father, who was in the stands at the US swimming trials watching his son qualify for a fifth Olympic team, and in May his fiancée Nicole gave birth to their son Boomer.

TEAM CO-CAPTAIN

While Phelps has been a hero for a generation of American swimmers, he has now finally become something of a mentor and elder statesman of the US team. At each Olympics the US swimming team picks a captain and until a July training camp in San Antonio, it had remained one of the very few honours not bestowed on Phelps. Now, chosen as co-captain of the men's team for the first time, he is eager to assume the leadership mantle in Rio. "This time around, I just want to be able to help some of the younger guys," said Phelps.

"Just being able to help them just kind of stay in their relaxed zone, not get worked up because it is the Olympics." The growing maturity has not diminished the fierce competitiveness, however. Having qualified for Rio in three events, the 100 and 200 metres butterfly and 200 individual medley, he will also be a candidate for the relays as he looks to add to his astonishing tally of 18 gold medals. Phelps has made the 100 fly and 200 medley gold medals his personal property at the last three Olympics and he could join discus thrower Al Oerter (1956-68) and long jumper Carl Lewis (1984-1996) as the only athletes to win gold in the same individual event at four consecutive Games. While still an undeniable force, Phelps no longer competes with the aura of invincibility that once surrounded him.

He conceded that his times at the US trials would have to dramatically improve for Rio, but is confident his longtime coach Bob Bowman will have a plan to get him to the wall first. "I do understand that I have to swim faster to have a chance to win the gold medal," said Phelps. "I've trusted that man since I was 11 years old, and it's not going to stop. I'm sure he's already come up with some kind of plan to figure out what we're going to do. I'm not going to put a limit on myself of what I can or can't do." — Reuters



LONDON: In this Aug. 3, 2012, file photo, Katie Ledecky poses on the podium with her gold medal in the women's 800-meter freestyle swimming final at the Aquatics Centre in the Olympic Park during the 2012 Summer Olympics in London. Ledecky has gone from a surprise gold medalist in London to one of the world's most dominant swimmers at age 19. — AP

THE TALE OF THE TAPER

LONDON: Boxers have the tale of the tape, Olympic swimmers have the tale of the taper. Their path to peak performance is a tale of fortitude, stamina, sheer hard work and also body shaving to transform the hairy men in briefs into smooth-skinned warriors of the pool.

As Michael Phelps, the 18 times Olympic gold medalist preparing to make another splash in Rio, wrote in his 2008 book 'No Limits': "When the facial hair goes away, that's how you know I'm getting serious." Tapering is the process, also common to distance athletes, where weeks and months of hard training are allowed to tail off to give the body more time to rest before the burst of competition.

With swimmers often entered for multiple distances and disciplines, no one size fits all and getting it right is no easy task. It is a time of careful calculations.

"When you taper swimmers, it's like a haircut," says Phelps's coach and mentor Bob Bowman. "You never know if it's any good until it's too late." At the European championships in London in May, some competitors had been through national trials and were back into hard training while others were tapered for Olympic qualifiers.

That meant Britain's 200 metres freestyle

world champion James Guy, a medal hope for Rio, raced in the 400m heats with a beard and beach-style briefs when those around him wore thigh-length suits.

"I used it as a bit of fuel," he said. "I didn't want to jeopardise three weeks of fitness for this meet. I wanted to train through and race hard." Unlike Phelps and the US squad, whose qualifiers ended only in July, Britain's Olympic trials were in April and their swimmers then went straight into hard training. Chris Walker-Hebborn, who will compete in the 100m backstroke in Rio, set out his schedule. "Three weeks from the day I'm supposed to race I slowly start tapering down my meterage," the Briton told Reuters at an event organised by Adidas.

"Let's say I (normally) do 50k a week. Then the first week in would be 40k, the second week would be 30k and the last week would be just under 20k.

"The intensity drops down, the volume drops down and it just gives your body that chance to go through the adaptation of hard training and to rejuvenate and you are just a lot fresher come race day."

Team mates aiming at longer distances might have a shorter taper because of the fitness required, but there can also be mini-tapers and double-tapers.—Reuters



LONDON: In this Aug. 4, 2012, file photo, swimmer Michael Phelps poses with his gold medal in the men's 4 x 100-meter medley relay at the Aquatics Centre in the Olympic Park during the 2012 Summer Olympics in London. — AP