

Hungary's Dani Gyurta, 15, became the youngest Olympic medalist in swimming since 1932 when he captured silver in the men's 200 meter breaststroke at Athens. Be sure to pick up a copy of Swimming World Magazine and read, "Coming of Age," a story about Hungary's new superstar swimmer that includes a Q and A as well as a "How They Train" with sample workouts.

The following SwimInfo Interactive article provides even more background on Dani. It is written by Norbert Agh, a 1988 Olympian and Swimming World Magazine's European correspondent from Hungary:

The vast majority of the one billion-plus spectators who watched young Daniel Gyurta win a silver medal in the 200 meter breaststroke at the Athens Games last summer, undoubtedly were shocked by the brilliant performance of the barely 15-year-old Hungarian. He instantly became very famous in Hungary after Athens. You can see Dani's face everywhere--on TV shows, in newspapers, magazines and billboards. It seems that everybody in his country likes this youngster who seemingly has no problem with this sudden fame.

Swimming World has been watching Gyurta since 2001 and has been following his astonishing progress. It started when Dani was still 11, one month short of 12. Back then he swam 2:25.47 in the 200 meter breast (all of the times in this article are long course). It was unbelievable. According to our research that time was at least 10 seconds faster than the best 12-year-olds in the world, and he wasn't even 12 yet.

After that meet I asked him about the future. He just smiled and told me the following: "I will win the 200 breaststroke in the 2004 Olympic Games with a new world record. I know I will be only 15, but I know I can do it!" Even as an amazingly precocious 11-year-old, Dani was predicting Olympic gold for himself in Athens with the utmost confidence and certainty. Back then everybody was smiling at it and said that he was a young guy dreaming about the unachievable. And now there he was in Athens, standing on the podium, winning a silver.

Amazing? Yes! But what made this young man so supremely confident in his own ability? The facts speak for themselves.

Daniel was born in Obuda, an old and beautiful part of Budapest, to a middle-class family. He started to swim when he was 4 in 1993 at a small swimming school in Budapest. Daniel told me that as soon as he got to know the strokes he fell in love with breaststroke instantly. At the beginning of 1997 he was transferred to his first swim club, Darnyi Tamas Sport Club. Daniel's first coach at that club was Katalin Perjamosi (who, by the way, is the daughter of my first coach). According to Daniel, she was a good coach and a wonderful person who helped him to fall in love with swimming for good. A few months later, in March of 1997, he achieved his first medal when he got third in the 50 breast at a national meet. But he didn't have to wait to long for his first gold because, in July of the same year, he won the 100 breaststroke (1.40) at the Hungarian Age Group Championship. He swam with Katalin till the end of 1998 and won a few more national

golds in that year too (for example: 50 breaststroke, 37.9). After a small short cut, in May of 1999, he ended up where he swims today, a special club for talented young swimmers called Future Sport Club. His coach there was Sandor Szeles, who has been the head coach at the club ever since. He is the one who put Gyurta where he is right now.

According to Dani he is a very different guy, unlike all the others in the "old Hungarian school" and all around the world. Sandor is always one step ahead of the competition and working extremely hard to stay there. Sandor is the reason for Dani's improvements, without a doubt. Dani says that at first it was very unusual, but as soon as he started to adjust to the new circumstances he began to like Sandor's training. In this club they emphasize swimming technique much more, which is also very tiring.

Dani says Sandor gets his new ideas from watching the kids in practice, not from the books. He is very friendly and an amazingly talented coach who is always working on the technical skills. He is a nice person whose life is swimming and nothing else. Dani likes Sandor very much. They are very good friends, as they say.

I also wanted to know Sandor's opinion of Daniel. He said that Dani is a talented, self-conscious, persevering and diligent young boy. He is untiring and well behaved at practices. He is a guy whom every coach desires to train with. Since the Olympics they started to work on his start and turns and, if it goes well, we will start to see him soon in the 100 breast. He also could start competing in the IM, but it is too early to tell when this would be. Sandor says it is very hard to determine Dani's limits because he is still extremely young. Therefore, there are a lot of unanswered questions that could affect the future. But if everything goes on as planned and no injuries stop his steady improvement, Dani has still more than a few seconds of improvement in him. Sandor's goal for the 2005 World Championships is 2.09 in the 200 breast and 2.07 (with a gold medal) for the 2008 Olympics.

After all that I was wondering what Daniel's parents, Tamas and Judit Gyurta, thought about Sandor and--of course--also about their son. They told me that they trust Sandor so much that they let Sandor and Dani do their own business. They strongly believe that Sandor is the perfect coach for Dani and he is the only one who could lead him to the top. They also said that they do not have to control Dani too much; he finds and sets his own goals, which don't need to be directed. Dani writes his own diary day by day, since he wants to make sure that he will remember every detail when he will need it.

Szeles started to work with him when Daniel was exactly 9 years old. Sandor saw him before that in other clubs, so it was not a surprise to him that Dani was talented. Once they were on track and Dani improved very quickly, Sandor soon realized that Dani was very special.

Daniel swam his first Hungarian age group record when he was about to turn 10 in April of 1999 in the 200 breaststroke (2:58.4). With Sandor's sophisticated training methods Daniel started to compete in other strokes, too, which resulted in three more

gold at the Hungarian Nationals in the 100 fly and 200-400 free. Later in 1999, Daniel won his first international meet at Germany in the 200 breaststroke.

One year later came that attention-catching 2.25 in the 200 breast in Vienna, Austria. Being always a bit pessimistic, Sandor only begun to really believe that Dani could be an Olympic champ when Dani posted a 2.19 in 2001 in the very same meet a few months before his 13th birthday. Later in 2000, Dani went 2:16.58. Then in the summer when he turned 14, Dani swam 2:13.63 with which he made the semis at the World Championships in Barcelona.

His progress so far ends up in Athens at the Olympic Games when, as we all know, Dani Gyurta won a silver medal in the 200 breaststroke. This last few-seconds-drop begun in the prelims where he qualified with the best time for the semis. There Gyurta swam in the same heat with world record holder Brendan Hansen and qualified again first for the finals too. His time is a new Hungarian record (the former record was held by Norbert Rozsa for 12 years).

Everybody was curious. They wanted to know who that 15-year-old kid swimming in lane 4 in the final of the 200 was. When I asked him about the semis, Dani seemed to be very calm and did not make too big of a hassle about that, being only 15, he made the finals easily.

"I was only very nervous before the heats but calmed down for the semis and swam very confidently. I wanted to swim the second 100 much harder but I did not expect to swim 2.10. I wanted to swim a better time than in the prelims and make sure that I was in the final. About the final--we should not forget that Kitajima is the world champion and he is also well experienced. I don't want to make any assumptions but I know one thing for sure: I will do my best to swim even better then tonight."

And in the final he swam hard and got the silver behind Kitajima and before Hansen, becoming the youngest Olympic silver medalist in swimming history.