



OMSK SWIMMER NIKITA KONOVALOV: THE IMPORTANT THING IS TO COMPLETE THE DISTANCE AND TO ENJOY THE SWIM

🕒 16.11.2015, 11:20

SPORT

25-year-old Nikita Konovalov, a swimmer from Omsk, had a challenging year in 2015 but still managed to grab five national titles at the Russian Short Course Swimming Championships in Kazan.

Having made a name for himself at the national championships in 2009, Konovalov proved himself to be a capable athlete. Some remember him as 'that athlete with the World of Warcraft tattoo' while others know him as a world long course silver medallist (2009), world short course silver medallist (2010), multiple short course medallist at nationals, Europeans and worlds.

Representing the Volgograd Oblast at the tournament in Kazan, Nikita Konovalov took five gold medals (50m and 100m butterfly, 100m backstroke, 4x50m freestyle, 4x100m individual medley) and one silver (4x100m freestyle).

– I always wanted to win the competition with the absolute best result. I hope that it will happen soon. So far I have failed to achieve it because the point table gives a head start to breaststroke swimmers. They show lesser time but still get more points.

– Which race was most important to you?

– There was no specific race; the entire tournament was important. The previous season was a breakdown; I failed to get in shape because of my injuries. I couldn't achieve the speed I wanted; I was not happy with the results I showed at competitions in spring and summer. Basically, while swimming a heat I was not able to show everything I was capable of. My lactic acid test results taken after the heats were less than the average number as if I had been swimming at half my ability. It was important for me to achieve my personal best so that I will feel stronger psychologically.

– Are the coaches happy now?

– Yes, they are. And our leader, Viktor Avdienko, is also in a good mood because of our medals.

– What are your predictions for the European championships?

– It's hard to tell who will compete there and how well conditioned they will be there. Besides, you need to keep in mind that it's an Olympic year. Some will save their energy, some are going to break world records. It's hard to predict anything.

– How much importance do you attach to the Europeans?

– Basically all competitions are important to me, even the Military World Games in Korea where I was far from being in a perfect shape but I still went to the starting block and swam all kinds of races: butterfly, freestyle, backstroke. I brought home six medals, and I grasped fully that I won these medals only when I came back. It doesn't matter what event you are swimming, the important thing is to complete the distance and to enjoy the swim.

– Who else showed a good performance at the Russian championships?

– In terms of endurance and stamina, it was Sergey Fesikov. I see that he's not in top form yet. I think if he keeps training as hard as he is training now, he will show his best time at the Europeans. I see that it's hard for him, but he still goes and fights, he doesn't give up easily. I can say the same about Vyacheslav Sinkevich. We were trained by the same coach, in the same team. He now starts showing his best times again – it's very difficult for him I know. He's a person who has come a long way and wants to become a leader again. But the leadership is not achieved in a day: if last year he couldn't even make it to the semifinal, this year he took a medal. I'm happy for him.

– What will you need to work on in the lead-up to the Europeans?

– My research advisor tapes all my races and then prints out my swim times and splits. He gave me once a print out with my time against the times shown by Chad le Clos in the 50-100m butterfly and Matt Grevers in the backstroke. I outclass them on the straightaway but I lack skills in performing flip turns and other technical elements. These renowned athletes simply beat me in terms of technique rather than in terms of speed. Somehow they are more technically skilled – their flip turns are powerful – I haven't got so much strength yet. I need to do more indoor training and improve my flip turns, only then I will best my time or quite possibly have the best result in the world.

– Will you have enough time to be ready for the Olympics?

– There will be long course with just one flip turn. I hope that it will not affect my performance. I will focus on improving my speed on the straightway. I think that everything will turn out well. I will do my best.

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