



Olympic

Scottsdale's Roland Schoeman aims for a fifth Olympics

Dreams

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Most Olympic stories begin with a young kid who has talent, ambition, and the heart of a champion from an early age. For Gold, Silver and Bronze Medalist Roland Schoeman (who is also the current world record holder in the short-course 50 meters freestyle, with a time of 20.30 seconds), however, the story has a slightly more amusing beginning.

"When I was in my second year of high school there was a girl who was a freshman who was very cute and I sort of fancied her," Schoeman says, laughing. "She was on the club swim team and I thought, what better way to get to know her than by joining the swim team? At that point I was playing for my senior rugby, cricket and tennis teams; I'd always been an athlete. Swimming was another great thing to do during the summer. After three months of swimming and dating, this girl and her family moved out of town and that was the end of that budding romance. But, there was something about swimming that I loved and I was starting to excel very quickly and my coach at the time said I think you should start investing a lot of time and effort into this. I dropped all of my other sports and very, very quickly I became a South African champion; that was two years after starting to swim. I made the Commonwealth teams, broke my first South African and African records, so it was sort of a meteoric rise. Very unexpected, but I worked my butt off to get there."



Even though he had played and excelled in other sports, it was an early love for water that has made all the difference in his career.

"I could have foreseen a future in one of the other sports, but there was just something about swimming," he explains. "I've always been a water baby. From the

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time I was a kid, we'd always go to the ocean for December vacation, always spent time in our backyard pool, and it was just an affinity for water that I had. That's probably the reason I'm one of the oldest swimmers, it's that I still love what I'm doing, I'm still excelling, and I'm still finding ways to excel. And no South African has been to five Olympic Games, so that's my goal at this point."

While a fifth games would be quite an achievement, Schoeman has great memories from the four he's already competed in (2000, 2004, 2008, 2012). Even his least favorite Olympics, Beijing, was a still a great experience that was only slightly marred by smog and a strange rule that forced his teammates out of the Olympic Village

once their events were over. As for his favorite games? That's a pretty easy answer.

"That would be Athens," says Schoeman. "To go to the birthplace of the modern Olympics and to have won three Olympic medals there was special, very special. You can't go wrong there. The facility was great—I love swimming outdoors. It was beautiful in the sun, I just felt energized. The facility was great, the village was great, the nightlife afterwards was sublime. It was just the whole package of it. I think London went out of their way to make it pretty phenomenal, too. Unfortunately, it

wasn't a successful games for me, but I would probably say the London Olympics next."

Regardless of the location, one thing has been a constant at each Olympics: the spirit of the games.

"Everybody is there because they're the best in the world. They deserve to be there, they've worked their butts off to be there. They've excelled in something that they've believed in and everybody's there to represent their country. It's one of the few events in the world where the racial boundaries and the religious boundaries are overlooked. Nobody cares about that. That's the great thing about sports; it's such a unifier of nations and unifier of people that we can actually just go there and compete and do our countries proud and not think 'this person's this color' and so on. That's the amazing thing about it: to see the joy in people's faces that they've won a medal or just the ability to go there and compete. Of course you hear heart-breaking stories of people expecting to win a medal and not, but there's so many stories of triumph and reward coming out that are motivating and inspiring."

Not many people in the world have ever attended an Olympic Games, and even fewer have competed or won medals in one. Schoeman is in the super-elite class of multi-medal winners. He won all three of his medals (Gold, Silver, Bronze) at Athens in 2004, and though each is a special memory and achievement, one stands out above the rest.

"The best would probably be the gold medal in Athens," Schoeman says. "No one really believed that our relay had a chance to win that. Everybody was always talking about the American team and the Australian team and the French team, but six months before, we were saying, 'That's our best shot.' Despite our differences that we may have had as individuals, we really became a team. Most of the big countries have six or seven people swimming that event. They have four in the morning, then they make adjustments and have three new people in at night, and we were just the same four guys in the morning and night. We almost broke the world record in the morning and it was like, 'Where'd the South African team come from?' So to have won that medal and shocked the world and to do that well in the opening days, that was so special, and to be able to share that with three people. I think that definitely overshadows anything I've done individually."

Schoeman was the first to swim in that relay (4 x 100 meter Freestyle). He was ranked number one in the world at that time and the strategy, which obviously worked well, was to load up the front of the relay and get an early lead. By the time the second swimmer jumped in the pool,

Schoeman had given him a lead of just over a body length and the rest, as they say, is history. In addition to his Olympic achievements, Schoeman's career to date includes being a former world record holder in multiple distances (50m Butterfly, 4x100m Freestyle, 100m Freestyle and 100m Individual Medley). He also holds three gold, a silver and a bronze World Championship medals, as well as four gold, three silvers and three bronzes from the Commonwealth Games.

Schoeman is very candid about what sets swimming apart from other sports in terms of ego and achievement.

"I don't think there's enough money involved in swimming to have the huge prima donnas and I think the real difference in swimming is that you're measured by the time on the watch. If you're not putting the effort into your training, the results are going to show. It's not like a team sport where you can slack off during the pre-season and still be on a team that wins a Super Bowl. There you have other guys that can elevate your performance, whereas for us, people understand that nothing comes easy in this sport. You have to work your butt off every single day to be the best in the world. And if you are the best in the world, you've gotta keep doing it because it can be taken away from you just as easily."

When he's not training, Schoeman, who lives in Scottsdale now, loves golfing and checking out local restaurants. Citing Chop Shop and Nourish as two local spots with great, healthy menus, he is always on the lookout for new options where he can eat delicious food while maintaining his diet. Recently, he switched to a high-fat, low-carb diet that keeps him in prime shape for his hours in the pool and in the weight room. By pulling carbs and loading up on healthy fats, he keeps his body in a constant state of ketosis, supplemented by a combination of Advocare supplements, a brand that he represents as an advisor.

"This new diet with the supplements I'm taking is just awesome," he says. "I'm not nearly as sore and stiff as I used to be. At 33 years of age, when everyone writes you off and says you're too old for international sports, I'm feeling better than I did as a college athlete. I wish I knew then what I know now."

Schoeman trains at a facility in Phoenix, where some of the youngest and best local swimmers are perfecting their game. Though he says most of the kids (the oldest on the team is 17) are nervous to approach him for advice, he's always happy to help with form and stroke techniques. In addition, he's got great words of wisdom for anyone looking to pursue a dream, and is passionately committed to empowering people both in and out of sports.

"I grew up having people—teachers, other people—just telling me how useless I was, how I'd never excel at anything, and I think that's all too common in our life. People are out there having their dreams squashed by people who have no idea what they are going through. Only I know how many hours I've put in and only I know how hard I work in the swimming pool, so for somebody to judge me would be stupid. For anyone out there who has a dream—only you can determine your successes and your failures. If you have an innate belief that you want to achieve something, work for it. If you have failure, use the failure to drive you forward. That's what a true champion is, someone who fails 99 times and gets up a hundredth time. That's what my career has been. I've failed more times than I've succeeded, but that's what drives me."

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