

Brookes Diary

By Brooke Hanson

Finally my life long journey to the Olympic Games is about to begin. The time between the Telstra Olympic Team Selection Trials and the eve of departure for the Games has flown by and to think I'm only three-and-a-half weeks away from the biggest swimming carnival of my life - the worlds ultimate sporting event.

Before I knew it after the trials, I was back into a training routine at Nunawading that I thrive on and trying to juggle it with my outside commitments. The media attention I received has been fantastic; I'm really stoked to be getting some recognition after all my hard work and years of sacrifice.

I lay in bed at night thinking about what has changed from other years and the only real answer I can come up with is that I have been dedicated to the cause.

In the lead up to the Trials I treated it like a "do or die" step in my life. I left no stone unturned in my preparation, both in the pool and in the gym.

I definitely have to thank Endless Spas and Australian Swimming, as without a regular income I would not have been able to focus solely on training and recovery and that has been a major factor in my faster performances in the pool.

Not having something on every day, gave me more time to relax rest and recover from each training session. It gave me more energy in each session and if I'm not giving 100 percent in every session, I can really notice the difference in my times and technique.

By being ready to swim as fast as I can every day has physically and mentally prepared me to know I can once again, swim faster than I have ever swum before.

And I want to let you in on a little secret before I start my daily diary notes from the Australian team camp in Germany and during the Olympic Games.

The weekend before I left was spent celebrating where I had come from and where I was heading. Acknowledging the Olympic dream and being proud that the moment to leave had arrived.

On Friday July 23 and Saturday July 24, I swam my last, hard, max efforts to end the Australian training sessions on a great note.

On Friday, I clocked 1:06.0 for a short course 100m breaststroke (just outside the world record) and a 2:13 for the 200 individual medley.

The next day at 6.30am I swam 1:09.02 in a long course 100m breaststroke time trial without the Speedo Fast Skin suit and at 6:55am when I suited up, I clocked a 30.71 (on coach Mark Thompson's stop watch) and 30.80 (on coach Grant Watson's stop watch) – an unofficial Australian record, beating my own National record of 30.91 and just 0.22 outside Zo0e Baker's world record.

The entire Nunawading squads stopped and it felt like every breath I took it was the Olympic final. The cheering from all the kids was amazing and my stroke felt strong and fast, although I was really fatigued.

I was pumped with my swims and really ready to enjoy the official farewell pancake morning over at the Nunawading clubrooms.

It was time to tell everyone about my preparation and thank them for their support and show them the one item that was the highlight of my whole Olympic preparation – the Olympic torch, which I carried around the MCG - what a buzz to receive that torch from the legendary Herb Elliott.

I was now ready to start the final days in Melbourne, pack my bags and get ready for the trip of my life time – I'm going to the Olympic Games!

July 28

We departed out of Melbourne with a big hug and few tears with Jared (my boyfriend) after attending the Telstra Hero Message launch. All the build up and emotion to get ready for the Olympics was starting to make me realise that the trip of a life time was starting to become a reality – I was actually getting on plane to go to the Olympic Games in Athens. We received a pleasant surprise when all the Melbourne based swimmers were upgraded to business class for the flight to Singapore where we caught up with the rest of the swim team on route to our training camp in Sindelfingen via Frankfurt.

July 29

Arrived in Sindelfingen, a quite little town in the south of Germany and it was exactly what I needed after the big build up at home. A place to start our taper where there were no distractions. A place to train, eat, go to the gym, sleep, relax, read, listen to music, watch DVDs and get my body ready for what lay ahead – our biggest meet with our strongest team ever. It was also the start of a month with my “best roomie” Elka Graham.

July 30

It was important to settle into a normal sleeping pattern and I actually struggled a bit with the change in time zone. I trained outdoors for the first time in months to get me ready for the Olympic Pool in Athens with no roof.

July 31

We trained in the morning and Elka and I headed out to the local shopping Mall and we had a great afternoon together, shopping, trying on clothes and looking at all kinds of stuff. We purchased a few items to add that German touch to our wardrobe. Also managed a Gelati and of course the daily bottle of Pepsi

August 1

Training is going really well and it's great to have my own coach from Nunawading, Mark Thompson, on the team and also our training group, Elka, Melissa Morgan and Michelle Engelsman – we all get on so well together. We are having a really good time and making the most of every day. It is now only one week until we arrive in Athens and enter the Olympic Village. I'm getting so excited. In the evening the Australian team hosted a special reception to thank the mayor of Sindelfingen. But in the afternoon we had to get our dry cleaning back and

our official Australian Swim Team striped shirts had shrunk and lost colour and my white singlet had turned grey, but it's all good, we're having a really good time and making the most of every day.

August 2

Today was my last gym session. I feel strong and ready to swim faster than ever. My gym coach Simon Moule has done a great job and I owe him heaps. We had a women's team meeting which was a great get together and our six previous Olympians spoke about their experiences and how the whole team could learn from some of the mistakes they had made. The coaches spoke about how far we had all come in four years and how we all deserved to be part of this team.

August 3

Tonight we had the team trivia night, which was a lot of fun.

We were all put into groups of eight but there was a big surprise at the end of the night. A DVD was put on as a tribute to five swimmers who have been part of the Australian Swimming Team for ten years Petria Thomas, Adam Pine, Sarah Ryan, Michael Klim and I. The presentation was fantastic and I had a tear in my eye looking at the footage from the 1994 Commonwealth Games when I was just 16. The team gave us a standing ovation and I was so overwhelmed that we had been recognised.

August 4

I woke up so happy after last night's tribute. It was a wonderful moment and once again a proud feeling of being part of the Olympic team I went training and felt much better. My stroke was back on track and I am finally starting to feel like I'm tapering.

August 5

Tonight we had a full team meeting and our psychologist Clarke Perry spoke to us about how we were about to enter the circus and no matter how many distractions the circus provided we needed to focus on what we were going there to do and that was to swim as fast as we could. This team is really special and everyone gets on really well. When you can create a happy, relaxed environment that everyone enjoys being part of great swims, medals, PBs and team success is inevitable.

August 6

Throughout this week I have asked everyone on the team to sign a special book for our head coach Leigh Nugent. The night before I left Melbourne his wife Karen had brought it around so I could get everyone to sign it a special memento that could stay in the Nugent family for generations making sure 70 people all completed the task was something I really wanted to do to say thank you. Tonight we had Olympic Rookies night which was Karaoke and it was so much fun.

We dressed up, tried to sign, danced around, and made fools of ourselves.

August 7

After training, the whole team went on an outing to a small German town and we shopped, took photos and ate in a wonderful café. I took in the scenery and really enjoyed being in another country.

Sometimes you have to pinch yourself to realize how lucky you are to be a part of this team, touring the world and seeing so many great places.

August 8

Today I had a good chat to our former head coach and team mentor Don Talbot who told me not to get psyched out by the fact I'm going to the Olympic Games he said to me "Don't get scared of who you are racing, you can beat them all, be in there for a medal if I believe I can". It was great to see that he believed in me. Don was right I know I've got what it takes, my body is in the best shape it has ever been in and I can feel that and see that in and out of the water. That afternoon I swam a 100 time trial eight days out from when I race. I clocked a 1:07.47 and it hurt like hell over the last 25 metres. I still have lots of rest to come but now I know I am on track for an Olympic medal. We received our Olympic team travel shirts at a team dinner and then packed my bags. We leave for Athens tomorrow.

August 9

The alarm went off at 5:15am and the Sindelfingen training camp was over and the day had arrived that we would enter the Olympic village. I couldn't believe at 26 I was finally entering a world I had been dreaming of my whole life. Australian Swimming had arranged for a charter flight to take us directly from Stuttgart directly into Athens. We got through Customs, received our accreditation which was my pass to the Olympics, collected our bags and had lots of photos taken with what was going to be our Olympic Gold Pass for the next three weeks. When we left the airport in two buses it seemed like there was over 100 cameramen and television crews lining the streets just to get a glimpse of the Aussie swim team. We all felt like superstars. Before we knew it we had arrived into the village and sharing our apartment were Petria Thomas, Linda Mackenzie, Libby Lenton, Marieke Guehrer, Elka Graham and "the Chook".

Next stop was team outfitting and we were given trolleys and went around collecting our gear from Woolmark and Nike. We tried on everything and swapped for bigger and smaller sizes I actually swapped shorts with Leisel and then our bags were packed for us full of 100's of different items of clothing. It was just fantastic. We headed back to the village for lunch and then off to the pool for training. It was great to finally have all my Olympic team gear, a very proud moment.

August 10

Five days until I race. I had a swim this morning and felt great. I can't believe how quick our journey to this point has been. I am only days away from the moment I have been waiting for all my life. I felt no different than normal, just full of confidence that I had built inside me for the last twelve months I knew I had done everything possible and I'm ready. No nerves or excitement just an inner peace that I was content with. Nothing else could be done it was now a case of mind over matter.

August 11

My full day of rest so I decorated our apartment and my room with Aussie flags, streamers, balloons, motivational quotes, photos and messages and cards from home. I had a massage, explored the village and checked my emails.

August 12

Had a great sleep last night and did some fast 50's in the competition pool. Tonight Roy and HG from the Olympic Dream visited the village. We had an Aussie team get together and a Greek barbecue. I would have preferred steak, snags, onions and a few prawns but still enjoyed the Greek food with two great Australian comedians.

August 13

The day of the opening ceremony, but for me it meant a light swim and the traditional shave down, but no marching. I waved to everyone who was off to the big parade, including my coach and my dad. I'm sure they were going to have a great night. It was something I had planned to miss for a long time. I wanted an Olympic medal real bad and I used that time to rest. I watched the Aussies enter the stadium what an awesome moment, and then I hit the sack.

August 14

Day one of swimming competition and it was a thrill to watch my teammates race and for me to get used to the competition set up.

I had a light swim before starting my visualisation of swimming fast. We cheered Ian and Grant on to our first Gold and Silver in the 400m freestyle and we all stayed on to watch the women's 4x100m relay win Olympic Gold in a new world record. What an amazing moment for the sport of swimming and for Australian women's sport.

It may have taken years to build up the women's team but it was well worth it. I felt so proud to be a woman, an Aussie woman. I'm glad my mum was there to see such a fairytale swim by the women's team. I have a really good feeling that our girls can really shine this week.

It was time to calm down, relax and chill out from the great high we had just experienced. Tomorrow I would make my Olympic debut.

August 15

This is it my first race of the Games. I had a great sleep and I was up at 7:40am for a shower and off to breakfast in the Dining Hall with Linda Mackenzie. Cereal, juice, toast and I added a coffee for a bit of spark – my first in weeks and not as good as our new coffee machine at home, but it did the job.

We jumped a bus; I plugged my I Pod in and listened to some R & B the whole way to the pool. I then stretched and went to the toilet three times. I warmed up with a 400m freestyle easy, 5x100m freestyle/IM hard pace, opening up all my systems, the 200m drill, 4x50m build (two speed drill, explode 4-5 strokes, 2x25s dive – times: 14.9, 14.2).

My warm up for my Olympic debut was over and it was time to suit up and get ready.

I was in the first seeded heat in lane four.

I wanted to set a good pace that the girls could chase in the following heats. I felt great from the dive. Twenty strokes for the first lap and then 22 and half the second – 32.0 seconds split and 35.3 coming home for a 1:07.31, a nice comfortable heat swim. I was glad it was over and the taper had worked and now I could focus on technique for my semi-final and final. I did an interview with Kieren Perkins for Channel Seven and then wound around the mixed zone and spoke to the waiting Australian media. I told them the atmosphere was electric and the pool was so blue and the sun so bright. I saw myself on the big screen and I couldn't believe it was me. I had just won my heat at the Olympics and it was great. I wanted more of this feeling. I swam down and had a rub.

The afternoon went pretty quickly. I had my routine sleep and went to our team meeting before preparing for the semi-final that night. I arrived at the pool, stretched, dived in for my warm up and I have to admit, I felt like crap.

That afternoon the wind had picked up and things started to mess with my head.

Tried to be positive about the wind and the storm forecast but deep down I was concerned about how it would affect my performance.

I had changed my stroke but it wasn't that low that I could dodge the wind.

I didn't want it to, but it was playing on my mind.

No matter what level you swim at or compete in sport, negative thoughts do come into play and Sunday the 15th of August 2004 they were overtaking the positive ones.

My 100s in warm up which I use to open up my system felt terrible and were five seconds slower than the morning times.

My stroke wasn't coming as easy.

I had gone from feeling fantastic in the heats, swimming in the sun, perfect outdoor conditions to the opposite in the evening – cold, cloudy, dark, windy. That morning I wore a t-shirt but now I had a full tracksuit and wet weather jacket on.

I did not feel that good and I really wasn't nervous.

I started stressing out – no nerves, no nothing, no excitement, and no anxiety attacks.

It could have been the local district meet for all I knew.

I had a can of Red Bull and listened to some pump up tunes. Still nothing.

I hoped it would come with Thommo's pre-race talk or if not in the marshalling area.

I watched semi-final one and Leisel was awesome, breaking the Olympic record and Sarah Poewe from Germany also improved on her heat time.

I thought that's OK, I've already gone 67.3 – I just have to improve on that.

Walking out for the semi-final was strange. I still had no pre-race nerves.

The gun went after the starter had once again held the start, a pattern we had seen in all the heats, semi-finals and finals.

My start wasn't that fast and I panicked with a few short strokes. I turned second at the 50m mark and I could see the US girls Amanda Beard and Tara Kirk on the turn and I panicked again as I was really keen to win the semi.

My strokes started to rate up and shorten up.

I wasn't feeling comfortable and really felt like I was under a lot of pressure from both sides of me, especially the last five metres. I touched the wall to see I hadn't won the semi.

Tara won the semi and I had swum slower than the heat clocking 67.7 – half a second slower and really not what I was looking for.

On a positive side I had just made my first Olympic final.

AUGUST 16

The day I had been waiting for all my life had arrived. I had a good chat to Petria Thomas about the negativity I had gone through the previous night and she was great. Petria was one of my room mates and someone who I have admired all my career and she had started out with two gold medals and she told me I had done the work and to forget about the semi-final and tonight was going to be my night.

I had a light swim in the morning, lunch, and a traditional afternoon pre-race sleep, had a chat to Jared back in Melbourne, listened to my I Pod the whole way to the pool on the bus. The warm up felt great, Thommo gave me my final chat, I went to marshalling, walked out, the crowd was going off, I looked up at the team, saw dad looking down and he gave the Hanson family “cooee” from one side and mum gave it from the other.

I looked down the lane, knowing that this was my time to shine. My confidence was growing with every name being announced, waiting to wave to the Olympic Games crowd when Brooke Hanson (Australia) is called.

I cracked my toes, slapped my thighs and arms to fire them up into action – it's time to GO HARD! I said to myself this is it Brooke, let's fight these girls to the finish.

My key words were – strength and power as I again looked at the blue line of “lucky lane six” the same lane that Jon Sieben had Duncan Armstrong had won Olympic gold medals from in 1984 and 1988.

Would this be my lucky lane too?

The first 50m felt great and I turned and saw the girls to my right, Tara and Leisel underwater and I thought to myself – this is it, you've done a million backend 50s in this preparation – but this is the most important one.

I knew I had to keep it together over the final 20 metres, when it really started hurting, remembering the key words, “long and strong” – get to the wall – I knew I had to do the best finish of my life.

I turned to the scoreboard not knowing where I had come, as I couldn't line up the names, lanes and finishing positions. I could see that the other Chinese girl from lane eight had been disqualified. I was looking up at the other board thinking I had come sixth – but I was actually in lane six.

I looked up at the team and dad, asking, did I get second?

Then I looked at Thommo (smiling) holding two fingers up saying “second”.

It wasn't until I swam under the lane ropes, looking up at the scoreboard, that I fully realised I had just won the Olympic silver medal.

All I can remember is talking to Kieren Perkins for the Channel Seven broadcast with Leisel and seeing Elka Graham staring at me through the hessian and we touched hands, that was a special moment. Elka you're the best.

I was then greeted by the Australian media in the mixed zone with Nicole Livingstone (the last Victorian woman to win an individual swimming medal in Barcelona in 1992) leading the questioning.

Dad, in his role as an MLO on the Olympic team was waiting and he gave me a hug and I just kept looking at him in disbelief and then my brother Kurt, who was in the mixed zone as a working journalist also gave me a hug before Thommo and David Wilson (Willow) our team manager and another Nunawading boy also gave me the biggest hugs.

I then really enjoyed my medal presentation, taking my own photo, before a swim down, drug test, press conference, a photo shoot with dad, Dave Mason and Kurt in front of lucky lane six, a teary reunion with mum who gave me the lucky Aussie scarf, before the security kicked all the parents out, and then a host of radio interviews on the way home.

Dad and I walked through the Village at around midnight and when we got back, it was so quite and peaceful. He kissed me good night, before we ventured off into our rooms. I still had the laurel wreath on my head and the medal around my neck.

It was still around my neck when I woke up the next day. I had to make sure I wasn't dreaming.

AUGUST 17

This was a day of rest and it was time to get my head around what I had achieved and what lay ahead with the 200m and hopefully the 4x100m medley relay.

AUGUST 18

I felt good in the heat of the 200m breaststroke and also in the semi-final and was stoked to make my second Olympic final, but I have to admit I was stressing over the relay selection and didn't get any sleep at all.

AUGUST 19

I had a light swim in the morning, lunch, a sleep (but very restless) before going to the team meeting. I ended up eighth in the final tonight, which I was happy with, but I was exhausted emotionally. I was told by the medley relay coach Alan Thompson that I had been chosen to

swim the heat of the relay the next morning, joining, Giaan Rooney, Jessicah Schipper and Alice Mills. I still wasn't out of the running for the final but to have to get my head and body around swimming fast in the morning would take some doing. I was determined to do the best possible job for the girls and the Australian Olympic Swim team. We clocked one of the fastest times in history – the fourth best all time in a heat and I clocked the fastest ever time by a breastroker in a relay heat – 1:07.40. But I knew then that it would not be good enough for a place in the final.

AUGUST 20

This afternoon they announced the 4x100m medley relay team at our team meeting and my name was not read out. The coaches had gone with Leisel, which must have been an agonising decision. One way or the other, Australia was going to have one of the fastest breaststrokes in the world. Leisel and I have pushed each other race-in-race-out for four years and that's why Australian female breast stroking is so good and it's why Australian women's swimming is so good – it's competitive. I was bitterly disappointed that I did not get that spot, believing that finishing second in the pressure-cooker atmosphere of the final would earn me that right. And I reckon it's only human to feel that way. But it wasn't to be and I congratulated Leisel on her selection and I knew the girls – Giaan, Leisel, Petria and Jodie would come together for a great swim.

AUGUST 21

This was a special day, as I had the chance to invite mum and Kurt into the Olympic Village and show them my room and shout them to lunch in the Dining Hall. They loved it. The final night was awesome with Hacky proving why he is the absolute swimming machine and the girls came together for a sensational world record in the relay. I joined my other teammates in the grandstand and yelled my lungs out for them. But deep inside I was hurting. It was also the day that the "Leisel and Brooke" rivalry started to hot up in the media. Sure we didn't talk for a few days and when you are emotionally upset you can say some things in the heat of the moment that you later regret. But believe me it is no big deal and these things happen in sport and you get over them and move on and that is what we have done. That night Leisel approached me and we had a big hug after our team meeting and we are very much on talking terms again. I have to mention the emotional speech I gave for Sarah Ryan, Petria Thomas and Todd Pearson at our final team meeting, after the swimming. These guys are legends and we are all going to miss them. It was tears all round.

AUGUST 27 and 28

Now it is time to party. The pick of the parties was no doubt the MTV Speedo bash and the Sports Illustrated party where we really let our hair down.

I got the chance to meet so many cool people like Danni Minogue, boxing great Evander Holyfield, the Princess of Denmark Mary Donaldson (see photo), Michael Phelps (see photo), my hero Jenny Thompson from the USA (see photo) and we danced and ate prawns and had the time of our lives.

AUGUST 29

The night of closing ceremony and what a blast. I was so excited after missing the opening ceremony that Elka and I were so pumped. It was great to walk around the Stadium with Dad, who has now been to six Olympics but equally special to see Mum and Kurt in the stands and I have to thank my good friends Ada Kok (Olympic champion) and Celia Muir from Speedo

International for getting Mum and Kurt their tickets. It made my night and was a fitting celebration for the best times of my life.

Tonight Leisel and I walked and talked all night and had our photos taken with all the girls. The night before we had been out dancing together, having an absolute ball. I know we are going to keep each other honest over the next four years – although Leisel, I think I leave the 200 metres to you and Amanda, these 26-year-old legs are going to concentrate on the 50 and the 100m from here on in.

Finally, thank you to everyone who has helped me make it possible, especially everyone at Nunawading, my family, my sponsors, Australian Swimming and in particular the Australian Olympic Committee – what a blast!