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## Tokyo 2020. Dania Nour, the dream of a Palestinian swimmer at the Olympic Games

*"Carrying the Palestinian flag during the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Olympics was a special moment that I will never forget. That feeling gave me the determination and motivation to succeed despite the difficulties"*



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. 17-year-old Palestinian Olympic swimmer from Beit Jala (Bethlehem), member of the Palestinian Olympic team comprising four more athletes: sprinter Hanna Barakat, judoka Wesam Abu Rmilah, weightlifter Mohammad Hamadail, originally from the Gaza Strip, and swimmer Yazan al-Bawwab. Dania was visibly moved as she carried the flag of her country, plagued by tensions, conflicts and political divisions. Palestine's participation in the Olympics is fairly recent: the first appearance was at the 1996 Games in Atlanta, USA, after the creation of the Palestinian National Authority in 1994 under the Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO, the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

that she will be "competing in the third 50-meter freestyle heat on Friday, July 30th." Dania will put all the strength and exuberance of her 17 years into improving her best time - currently 30.46 - hoping to qualify among 16 semi-finalists competing for the final. "I haven't managed to properly prepare over the last year because of the pandemic," she said. "But it doesn't matter. This is a tough Olympics for all athletes. I aim to score a good result for Palestine." Either way, it will be 30 seconds of glory." **Tokyo is also a time to wrap up lifelong sacrifices:** "I started swimming at the age of 6, when my mother encouraged me to join a summer swimming course. That's how I got into swimming for the first time. I also needed to lose weight. By the time I was 11 I had developed a veritable passion for swimming, including taking part in a championship in Qatar where I earned two silver and one bronze medal. I went into long training sets to establish new national records." The Olympic dream was coming true, pursued with great determination and perseverance. Not even the pandemic prevented Dania from realising her dream. "The lockdowns imposed by the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic made it impossible for me to leave for the Bolles school in Florida (USA), a breeding ground for champions, including Olympic champions, where I had managed to qualify for admission. I realised then," she said, without mincing words, "that this dream depended solely and exclusively on my willpower and my passion. I was aware that for me, a Palestinian girl, it would have been even more difficult, but

**I decided not to give up, to stay positive and continue pursuing my dream.**

I started training in a 25-metre pool, with coach Mohammad Halman, eight times a week before and after school. However, the pool is closed during the winter and I was forced to find another pool. In addition, during the pandemic I stopped swimming for over a year, which negatively affected my performance. Following a period of training in a 17 metre pool, I moved to Berlin for a one-month training period before Tokyo. It was quite a thrill because we have no 50-metre pools with starting blocks in Palestine and no experienced coaches. I trained for the first time in an Olympic pool in Berlin, with coach Sven Spannekrebs. **With only a few days to go before the competition,** Dania is keen to express her gratitude to her parents: "They have consistently supported me despite the many difficulties we face in our country caused by lack of sports facilities. I want to thank them because they placed their full trust in me and allowed me to take part in many international championships, notably the 2019 World Aquatics Championships in South Korea and the 2018 Asian Games in Indonesia. And now the 2020 Olympic Games The athlete is not put off by this "**huge responsibility**", followed by her family, friends and fans on social media. Her social network accounts are overflowing with good wishes, cheers, exhortations and greetings. "I am very proud to be a member of the Palestinian team. *Tokyo is a showcase that offers us the opportunity to show the world who we are. We have strong and ambitious athletes even if our sports facilities are not up to the standard of other countries.* While waiting to dive into the pool, Dania has been spending her free time in the Olympic Village getting to know athletes from other countries. "We are all focused on our goals," she said, "but this does not prevent us from exchanging impressions and experiences. We all agree on one point:

**The absence of in-person spectators tinges these Games with sadness."**



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