

## FOCUS ON WINNERS: REBECCA ADLINGTON

# Hard work and “lucky” swimsuits

**T**he Beijing Olympic Games offered Rebecca Adlington her first ever taste of Olympic competition, although her incredible performances at the event would suggest that never have given. On August 11, 2008, Ms Adlington became the first woman to win Olympic swimming gold for Great Britain since Anita Lonsbrough did so in 1960. Having broken the Commonwealth record with a time of 4:02:24 in the heats of the 400 metres freestyle, she went on to take the gold medal in the final with a time of 4:03.22.

Her success did not end there. Three days later, Ms Adlington set a new British, Commonwealth, European and Olympic record of 8:18.06 in the heats of the women's 800 metres freestyle. She went on to win her second gold medal in the 800 metres freestyle final on August 16 in a world record time of 8:14.10. She finished an incredible six seconds ahead of Italian silver medallist Alessia Filippi and her winning time broke the previous world record, which had been set by the USA's 1988 Olympic champion Janet Evans, by a whole two seconds. Until Ms Adlington's record-breaking swim, this was the longest-standing world record in swimming.

Ms Adlington also became the first British swimmer to win more than one gold medal at a single Olympic Games since Henry Taylor won three in 1908. Describing her experience at the Beijing Olympics, the young athlete unsurprisingly says: “It was an incredible experience and one that I'll never forget.”

### Quashing the rumours

Ms Adlington was one of the many swimmers that wore the Speedo LZR suit at the Games. She claims it definitely benefited her in the build-up to Beijing and during the competition. “It was fantastic to be able to wear a suit that not only performs in the pool but also gives you a psychological advantage when you prepare for a race,” she says. “My performance in both races was obviously down to years of hard training, but of course what you wear and how you prepare for something as big as the Olympics – both in and out of the pool – is going to help.”

*Rebecca Adlington won gold in both the 400 and 800 metre freestyle events at the Beijing Olympics last summer.*

 Speedo



There have been claims that the high-tech suit offers athletes an unfair advantage over other competitors. However, Ms Adlington makes it clear that, while choosing the right suit is important, training is the key to success. "Personal performance will always remain the determining factor in winning a race; nothing can take the place of the hours and hours of hard work we all have to put in," she says. "I'm only as good as my technique. So if I'm wearing the LZR Racer, it's only one element of a lot of other factors that contribute to my performance."

Ms Adlington became the new face of Speedo in January; however, she makes it clear that her chief concern going forward is the sport she has loved from such an early age. "My focus is my swimming, always has been and always will be, so I simply wear the best suit I can, that I'm most comfortable in," she says. "It's not for me to get involved in any discussions over the legalities of the technology – as long as the swimsuits are approved to wear and available to everyone then I'm happy."

She describes how details such as getting in and out of the suit need to be well thought through. "The suit is tough to get on so you have to build in enough time for that," she says. However, despite rumours that competitors have to be cut out of the skin-hugging suits, she confirms that this was not the case for her, although she rarely wears the same suit in major competitions. "I normally wear a new suit for each big race but at the Olympics I chose to wear the same suit that I won my first gold in for the 800 metres," she says, adding that that particular costume is "definitely a lucky suit" for her now.

### Innovations in swimwear

Although Ms Adlington is just 20, she has been swimming and competing for many years. She describes the developments in swimwear and equipment she has noticed most over the years. "The biggest development has obviously been the introduction of full-body suits, something which clearly had a significant impact on the sport. Since then we've seen new technologies, materials and designs come through with developments like stroke-specific suits giving swimmers a really great choice of product to choose from," she says.

As an athlete at the top of her sport, Ms Adlington believes there is still much more to come in terms of swimwear technology and innovation. "I think the developments in the sport in terms of swimwear and equipment are very much on-going and it's exciting to see the new materials, technologies and methods that brands such as Speedo are looking at," she says. And she is also enjoying having a role to play in the development process. "Being involved in the process is something that's very new to me and

I'm looking forward to working with Speedo over the next few years," says Ms Adlington.

She explains why it is important for manufacturing companies to keep coming up with new products for sports people to wear and whether she feels there is a point at which she feels innovation should stop. "Technological innovation is something we see across all sports, whether it's Formula One, tennis, golf or football – why should swimming be any different?" she questions.

"Swimwear has evolved so much over the years, even in the time I've been swimming I've seen some significant developments," says Ms Adlington. "As an athlete, I'm keen to have access to the best suits and kit there is available and, with that in mind, I'm looking forward to working with Speedo, as my new sponsor, on their on-going research and development. As long as the playing field remains fair and the technology is available to everyone, I think innovation can only be good for the sport," she concludes.

Ms Adlington is now training for the 2009 world swimming championships in Rome, which take place July 18 to August 2. She is planning to compete at the European championships, Commonwealth Games and world championships as part of her journey towards the defence of her Olympic titles at the 2012 London Games.

As this issue of WSA went to press, the latest FINA discussions on swimwear approval, which could affect the status of the Speedo LZR, were ongoing. 



*Ms Adlington is looking forward to helping develop new swimwear technologies and materials through her relationship with Speedo.*

 Speedo