

Sport

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SWIMMING

Jonkers excited about fast times

Paralympic swimmer ready to take on the world's best at the Athens Games

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SLASHING two seconds off her breaststroke personal best was a surprise that could not have come at a better time for Marayke Jonkers.

On Friday 22-year-old Jonkers leaves for the Athens Paralympic Games where she will compete in the SB3 50m breaststroke and 150m individual medley.

And during a training session at Cotton Tree pool yesterday she produced a swim that left her and coach Rob McBroom shocked and excited about just how close she was to winning a Paralympic gold medal.

Jonkers swam 50m of breaststroke in 1min02sec.

And that was after swimming 1min03sec on Monday.

Her previous personal best over that distance was 1min2.85sec, which she swam on the way to silver at the Paralympic Committee World Swimming Championships in Argentina in 2002. And yesterday's swim was four seconds faster than when she finished fourth at the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games.

Margaret McEleny from Great Britain swam 58.12 sec to win gold in Sydney and McBroom expects a similar time to be good enough for gold again in Athens.

McBroom said it was great to see Jonkers swim that fast, but what was more exciting was that she always swam faster in competition than in training.

"She's peaking at the sharp end which is good," McBroom said.

"I always go away thinking 'oh well she'll do a 1min30' and she'll do a 1min20.

"Then I think the best thing she could ever do is a 1min20 and she surprises me with a 1min02, so I'm hoping that she can grow an extra leg, so to speak (in Athens), and it'll be great. I'd be disappointed if she didn't win a medal."

McBroom said Jonkers was a definite silver medal chance in the 150m medley (backstroke, breaststroke, freestyle) but she was a better sprinter and in the 50m breaststroke she was one of four competitors so closely matched that it would come down to who wanted it more on the day.

Jonkers swims the breaststroke on Thursday, September 23 and the medley on Sunday, September 26.

She said her latest times had her "jumping out of my fast skin and feeling really good".

"When I was a little girl growing up I wanted to go to the Olympics, and I went to the Paralympics in Sydney.

"Now with breaststroke I just want to be the fastest and the best.

"And to win. I think it would be like a dream come true.

"And every athlete says it, but it would just make me so proud and so happy and all the pain and hard work would be worth it."

On a scale of two to 10, Jonkers' disability of three makes her the most disabled female swimmer in the Australian team.

She has been a paraplegic since she was eight months old when a driveway accident at her home left her with a broken back.



MEDAL HOPE: Marayke Jonkers models some of the new swimwear and gear she has received for the upcoming Paralympics in Athens in which she will compete in the 50 metre breaststroke and 150 metre medley.

Photo: Nicholas Falconer

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