



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF JEANNE DWYER

Next? It's Rio, Baby

Winnetka native Conor Dwyer has been a globetrotting celebrity ever since winning a freestyle swimming gold medal at the London Olympic Games. But the 23-year-old has no problem with getting back to basics. Achieving goals with hard work is the way he lives. So, now it's on to the Games of Rio de Janeiro. Between now and 2016, he'll swim at least 2,500 miles to get there.

Quintessential Barrington: At what point did you commit to going for the Games in Rio de Janeiro? Had that always been the plan, or did that decision come up later?

CONOR DWYER: I think I was planning for Rio all along, but it would have been a lot harder to think about the training for the next four years had I not qualified for this Olympic team. Making the team pretty much took care of that decision. I plan to race in five events – the freestyles and the individual medley.

QB: So, today is Oct. 1, and you just got back home to Gainesville, Fla. When does your training start?

CD: It's already started (laughing). Started today. Four to six hours a day with four hours in the pool (16,000 meters a day over four years) with 2 hours out of the water (for conditioning and strength).

Above: The Family Dwyer gathers for a photo taken after the Gold Medal Awards. Jeanne Dwyer, mother to Conor and his siblings, said, "We were so blessed to have so many family members in London, including Conor's Grandparents". Most of the family members live in the North Shore area.

Front row, from left: Colleen Burke-aunt, Sarah Dwyer-cousin, Bridget Dwyer-cousin, Dinny Dwyer-aunt, Nora and baby Ben Andrews-cousins, Elizabeth Burke-cousin, Kathleen Dwyer-cousin, John Dwyer-cousin, Fran Enright-cousin, Brian Dwyer-cousin, and John Dwyer-uncle. Second row, from left: Bill Burke-uncle, Sarah Tyrrell-aunt, Joanie Dowdle-aunt, Sarah Burke-cousin, Brennan Dwyer-cousin, Maureen Kenny-aunt, Jeanne Dwyer-mom. Third row, from left: Jim Dowdle-grandfather, Sally Dowdle-grandmother, Ben Andrews-cousin, Phil Kenny-uncle, Pat Dwyer-dad, Pati Dwyer-sister, Charlie Dowdle-cousin, Ryan Dowdle-cousin, Brenden Dwyer-brother, PJ Dwyer-brother, Spencer Dwyer-twin, Colin Dowdle-cousin and Jim Dowdle-uncle.



Conor siblings (from left) Patrick, Pati, Conor, Spencer, and Brenden in London the day after the swimming was over.

QB: Does it help you to know what the four years ahead of an Olympic Games actually require of a swimmer? How many miles?

CD: Yeah, in some ways it does, although it doesn't necessarily make it better. It's just that you now know how much work it will take, and what you have to do every day to be at the highest caliber possible.

QB: Can you tell now how much faster you will need to be in order to be a solid contender in every race? Is it an arm's length faster or a body length faster? Or is a range of times?

CD: It's more of focus on the work and what I have to do for myself every day. You don't really focus on the people around you so much. The job is to drop seconds off my times and not worry much about what other swimmers are doing.

QB: Will you start to focus on your likely freestyle competitors when it gets closer to Rio?

CD: No, Rio is so far off you can't worry about that now. Now it's a question of the biggest meet coming up next (the Pan-Ams, the Worlds, the Olympic Trials, etc). You focus on the next big meet and work on that.

QB: In the water while you race, are you

{ In the Swim }

It may have taken a village (Winnetka, that is) to raise Conor Dwyer, but it also took a very special mom.

Jeanne Dwyer's gentle but insistent tug at Conor's arm pulled him back into the competitive pool at Loyola Academy. He was a normal 5-foot-7 kid as a sophomore then and dabbled in every sport. But mom had been an All-American freestyler at Florida State in the late 1970s and early '80s, and she saw his potential. He began to get very good, very quickly.

Jeanne is a six-footer who admitted lobbying Conor's cause with college recruiters. "I'd purposely stand next to him," she told a reporter. "I'd be hoping someone would realize he was going to grow and they'd see his potential. I started swimming in high school and I ended up with a scholarship to Florida State. So I knew you can start late and achieve your goals.

Then Conor went from a 5-7 boy to a 6-5 man. Mrs. Dwyer says there is almost no chance that a son with three brothers, a sister and 40 first cousins is going to get too big for his britches in the Realm of Dwyer.

"I think there's no chance of jealousy because all of the kids in the family have seen that he's gotten what he has by working for it," she said. "He has given up a lot to be where he is: family, events, and holidays."



In London and on their way to the pool (before Conor's first Olympic event, the 400-meter Freestyle) is his immediate family (from left) Dad Pat, Pati, Brenden, Spencer, Patrick, and Mom Jeanne.

aware of your times and how fast you're going? Can you tell where everyone is around you?

CD: I'm not much aware of the times at all. I'm more of a speed racer. I am aware of people close to me and I'm racing them, but not so much based on what times we are racing.

QB: Long distance swimmers – like those who swim the English Channel – seem to know exactly how many strokes they need to finish and the length of each stroke. Is that your experience?

CD: Actually, I have no idea how many strokes I take in a lap. Everyone seems to have their own way of doing this. Mine is to go eye-to-eye, and beat the person next to me.

QB: News reports invariably say you're 6-foot-5, but seem to be nudging even higher. Are you turning into a 6-6 or 6-7 swimmer?

CD: Nah, I think I've stopped growing now. All of my three brothers are 6-5. I think there might be a little advantage in having the height I was given.

QB: Two years ago you left the University of Iowa and joined Coach Gregg Troy at Florida. You went from being a pretty good college swimmer to a world-class freestyler. What exactly did Troy mean to you?

CD: He has meant almost everything. He's the Olympic coach and what he has taught me has helped me become one of the best in the world. So, obviously, coming to him has one of the best moves in my entire career as a swimmer. He has his ways and I trust them. As long as it works – I'm sticking with it.

QB: Troy clearly has tough standards. When do you get a break from training?

CD: Break? (chuckling). I don't need days off. No days. I love swimming too much. But I have sacrificed a lot for my goals. I really enjoyed being a celebrity the last month, but my entire life since high school has been focused on the training. So I don't really have a social life like a student does. All the kids here in Gainesville are normal college students who lead normal lives. But I'm here to become one of the best swimmers in the world. I don't have time to be out at night. That's probably a good thing for me because I prefer a healthy lifestyle.

QB: Your mom was an All-American freestyle swimmer at Florida State. Did she have to swallow hard when she heard you were becoming a Florida Gator?

{ Water for People }

In addition to swimming, the passion in Conor Dwyer's life these days is Water for People, a worldwide charity devoted to providing water to impoverished regions in the world.

Dwyer and swimming pal, Ryan Lochte, have joined a drive to raise \$2 million to advance a basic need that is being shortchanged nearly everywhere poverty exists. The lack of available clean water often drives families deeper into poverty.

Women and girls in developing countries haul water for an average of four hours a day. That's hours of time lost that could be going to school, work, and play, according to the charity's organizers.

"When they came to us and asked us to help, we couldn't say no. It was a natural for me," Dwyer said. "Water has always been a part of my life as a competition, but to see what the absence of water means to people around the world puts all of what I do in some perspective. The idea that women and children have to walk four hours a day just to have water really shocked me."

Water for People develops sanitary infrastructure, wells, and water treatment systems, mostly in Third World Countries.

The organization now works in 10 countries: Uganda, Rwanda, Malawi in Africa; the state of West Bengal in India; Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua in Central America; Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador in South America.

For more information

● Dwyer and Lochte have videotaped a public service announcement for world viewing:
(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ck8XEZsx2Ws&feature=youtube>)

● Charity details are featured at:
<http://www.waterforpeople.org>

CD: She wasn't too upset. She knows Florida's program was better than Florida State. (Editor's note – there was a gentle poke in that response.)

QB: Since the London Games, you have been on worldwide celebrity tours as special guest at movie premiers ("The Expendables" as Sly Stallone's guest), New York fashion week events at Ralph Lauren; Paris Hilton, guest of honor at the Ryder Cup – not to mention partying with the Chicago Blackhawks. You have 50,000 Twitter followers. You are a star. Did you have any idea what was going to happen after winning the relay gold medal in London?

CD: I had absolutely no idea, and it has been amazing. I do the swimming because I love the sport and love to train, and I certainly don't do it for all of this. But it's just crazy about how big social media has become. I'm

pretty happy to be a part of it. It's been a joy ride for the past month. I got to hang out with Patrick Sharp and Patrick Kane from the Blackhawks, and I've always been a giant Blackhawks fan. So it's been a blast. But the truth is, I am ready to get back to serious training.

QNT: Let's say for discussion that you're a University of Florida graduate in sports management (which he is at age 23) and you get this guy named Conor Dwyer as a client. How would you handle him as a client?

CD: I think I would hire me. I think I'm pretty humble and enjoy the training part of this career; so I'm pretty easy to work with. Don't usually let distractions get to me. So, yeah, I'd like to work with someone like me. But, I have an agent (Erika Wright who also manages Olympic medalist Ryan Lochte). Her job is to line up sponsorships because that's how I earn a living now.


QB: Is there a single moment from the London Games that you hold closest to you and never want to forget?

CD: Yes, I think when I was standing on the medal podium and looking up into the stands and seeing 40 members of my family all cheering for me. That was a dream come true and something I worked for my whole life. I will never forget that. I hope to do more of in 2016.

QB: What do you think you'll remember about growing up in Winnetka? What do you take from that time?

CD: Mostly that it was the support of having this family. Not only do I have 40 cousins, three brothers and a sister, but the entire town has been like my family. I felt their support all the way to London. Everybody was so tuned into London. They even had a day for me when I came home. It was like one huge family. Everybody close to me was so competitive and I think that's where I get a big part of my competitive style. Whether it was swimming or hockey, or just playing baseball or football in the backyard with the cousins. Winnetka is like that. One day I hope to come back and live here. As for my determination, I think I got a lot of that from mom. She was never overbearing about sports, but just focused. That's how we all grew up.

QB: You and Lochte figure to have the spotlight shined on you for Rio. Ready to take center stage? Do you think people will be counting more on you for those Games?

CD: I hope so. I hope to get better every day, and take on that role. Right now, I think I'm sort of an underdog. I think that will change. There will be an expectation that we will win more medals in Rio. Ryan and I train together, but we haven't talked about that yet. But you train every day. You get better. You set more goals. As you can tell, I'm not much of a swim nerd. I don't know who I will swim against. And I don't think much about that. Everybody's fast. I can't worry about that. I've got too much work to do. 



David Rutter is the former senior editor at five newspapers, including the Lake County News-Sun. He is the editorial director at Quintessential Media Group.

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