

= Rebecca Soni =

Rebecca Soni (born March 18 , 1987) is an American former competition swimmer and breaststroke specialist who is a six @-@ time Olympic medalist . She is a former world record @-@ holder in the 100 @-@ meter breaststroke (short and long course) and the 200 @-@ meter breaststroke (short and long course) , and is the first woman to swim the 200 @-@ meter breaststroke in under 2 minutes 20 seconds . As a member of the U.S. national team , she currently holds the world record in the 4 × 100 @-@ meter medley relay (short and long course) .

Soni has won a total of twenty @-@ two medals in major international competition , fourteen gold , seven silver , and one bronze spanning the Olympics , the World , the Universiade , and the Pan Pacific Championships . She burst onto the international scene at the 2008 Summer Olympics where she won two silver medals and one gold . In the 200 @-@ meter breaststroke at the Olympics , she set the world record en route to winning gold , shocking Australian favorite Leisel Jones . Four years later at the 2012 Summer Olympics , Soni successfully defended her Olympic title in the 200 @-@ meter breaststroke in world record time , becoming the first woman to do so in the event .

She was named Swimming World 's World Swimmer of the Year award in 2010 and 2011 , and the American Swimmer of the Year award in 2009 , 2010 and 2011 .

= = Personal life = =

Soni was born in Freehold , New Jersey , in 1987 , the daughter of Peter and Kinga Sz?nyi . Soni 's parents are of Hungarian descent ; they emigrated from Cluj @-@ Napoca , Romania . Besides English , Soni also speaks Hungarian . Soni has one older sister , Rita , who was also a swimmer . Originally a gymnast , Soni began swimming at the age of ten .

Soni is a 2005 graduate of West Windsor @-@ Plainsboro High School North in Plainsboro Township , New Jersey . In July 2006 she had a cardiac ablation . Soni attended the University of Southern California and graduated in 2009 . She majored in communication at the Annenberg School for Communication .

At USC , Soni was a six @-@ time NCAA Champion , having won the 200 @-@ yard breaststroke in 2006 through 2009 and the 100 @-@ yard breaststroke in 2008 and 2009 . Soni currently swims for the Trojan Swim Club in Los Angeles with coach Dave Salo , who also coaches breaststroke world @-@ record holder Jessica Hardy .

In August 2010 , Soni became a spokeswoman for the United Nations Foundation 's Girl Up campaign . The organization focuses on improving the lives of the world 's adolescent girls .

She dated fellow U.S. Olympic swimmer Ricky Berens from 2010 to 2012 .

= = Career = =

= = = Early career = = =

As a 17 @-@ year @-@ old at the 2004 U.S. Olympic Team Trials , Soni finished 15th overall in the 100 @-@ meter breaststroke and 11th overall in the 200 @-@ meter breaststroke . The following year , at the 2005 World Championship Trials , Soni just missed a spot on the 2005 World Aquatic team after finishing third in the 200 @-@ meter breaststroke behind Tara Kirk and Kristen Caverly . Soni also placed fourth in the 100 @-@ meter breaststroke . At the 2005 Summer Universiade , Soni earned her first international medals by winning silver in the 100 @-@ meter and 200 @-@ meter breaststroke and gold in the 4 × 100 @-@ meter medley relay . At the 2006 World Short Course Championships , Soni finished in 4th place in the 200 @-@ meter breaststroke . Just a few weeks before the 2006 National Championships , Soni underwent a procedure called radiofrequency ablation to help regulate her heartbeat . Although it was not health @-@ threatening , Soni would sometimes experience a high heart rate which sometimes interfered with her training .

At the 2006 National Championships , the selection meet for the 2006 Pan Pacific Swimming Championships and the 2007 World Aquatics Championships , Soni finished tenth overall in both the 100 @-@ meter and 200 @-@ meter breaststroke .

= = = 2008 = = =

= = = 2008 Olympic Trials = = =

At the 2008 U.S. Olympic Team Trials , Soni competed in two events , the 100 @-@ meter and 200 @-@ meter breaststroke . In the 100 @-@ meter breaststroke , Soni finished fourth in a time of 1 : 07 @.@ 80 . Usually , the top two finishers would qualify for the Olympics . However , after second @-@ place finisher Jessica Hardy withdrew from the team and third @-@ place finisher Tara Kirk missed the entry deadline , Soni was chosen to swim the event . Soni earned her berth by being the swimmer already on the team with the fastest time in the event since January 1 , 2006 . In the 200 @-@ meter breaststroke , Soni won with a time of 2 : 22 @.@ 60 , the third @-@ fastest finish as of that date .

= = = 2008 Summer Olympics = = =

At the 2008 Summer Olympics , Soni won a silver medal in the 100 @-@ meter breaststroke , finishing behind world record holder Leisel Jones of Australia 1 : 06 @.@ 73 to 1 : 05 @.@ 17 . In the 200 @-@ meter breaststroke , Soni upset the heavily favored Jones , winning the gold medal and breaking Jones 's world record with a time of 2 : 20 @.@ 22 . Jones finished second with a time of 2 : 22 @.@ 05 . After the race , Soni said , " It 's been a long road to get here , I can 't believe what just happened . " Soni then combined with Natalie Coughlin , Christine Magnuson , and Dara Torres in the 4 × 100 @-@ meter medley relay to finish second behind Australia . Soni had the second best split time in the field (1 : 05 @.@ 95) behind Jones (1 : 04 @.@ 58) .

= = = 2009 = = =

= = = 2009 National Championships = = =

At the 2009 National Championships Soni competed in two events , the 100 @-@ meter and 200 @-@ meter breaststroke . In the 100 @-@ meter breaststroke , Soni easily won with a time of 1 : 05 @.@ 34 . In the 200 @-@ meter breaststroke , Soni again exhibited dominance by finishing first with a time of 2 : 20 @.@ 38 , just off her world record pace .

= = = 2009 World Aquatics Championships = = =

At the 2009 World Aquatics Championships , held in Rome , Soni set a meet record in the heats of the 100 @-@ meter breaststroke , with a time of 1 : 05 @.@ 66 . In the semi @-@ final , Soni recorded a time of 1 : 04 @.@ 84 to set a new world record and become the first female to finish under 1 : 05 for the event . In the final of the 100 @-@ meter breaststroke , Soni won the gold with a time of 1 : 04 @.@ 93 . Despite being the favorite in the 200 @-@ meter breaststroke , Soni went out too fast in the first half of the race and faded in the final meters , ultimately placing fourth . In the 50 @-@ meter breaststroke , Soni was narrowly beaten for the gold and the world record by two one @-@ hundredths (0 @.@ 02) of a second by Russian swimmer Yuliya Yefimova .

For her performance at the World Championships , she was named the American Swimmer of the Year by Swimming World Magazine .

= = = 2009 Duel in the Pool = = =

Soni then competed at the 2009 Duel in the Pool , a short course meet held in December at Manchester . In the 200 @-@ meter breaststroke , Soni broke Leisel Jones ' world record with a time of 2 : 14 @.@ 57 . One day later , Soni swam a 1 : 02 @.@ 70 in the 100 @-@ meter breaststroke to break Jones ' world record of 1 : 03 @.@ 00 .

= = = 2010 = = =

= = = = 2010 National Championships = = = =

At the 2010 National Championships , Soni qualified to compete at the 2010 Pan Pacific Swimming Championships in the 100 and 200 @-@ meter breaststroke . In the 100 @-@ meter breaststroke , Soni won in a time of 1 : 05 @.@ 73 . In the 200 @-@ meter breaststroke , Soni easily won with a time of 2 : 21 @.@ 60 , almost five seconds ahead of second @-@ place finisher Amanda Beard .

= = = = 2010 Pan Pacific Swimming Championships = = = =

At the 2010 Pan Pacific Swimming Championships , Soni won a total of three gold medals . In the 100 @-@ meter breaststroke , Soni recorded the third fastest time in history and the fastest time recorded in a textile suit with a 1 : 04 @.@ 93 to win the gold medal ahead of Australians Leisel Jones and Sarah Katsoulis . Her time was also the fastest ever recorded in a textile swimsuit . Two days after the 100 @-@ meter breaststroke , Soni then competed in the 200 @-@ meter breaststroke and the 4 × 100 @-@ meter medley relay . In the 200 @-@ meter breaststroke , Soni dominated the field with a time of 2 : 20 @.@ 69 . Leisel Jones came in second in 2 : 23 @.@ 23 and world record holder Annamay Pierse came in third with a time of 2 : 23 @.@ 65 . Less than an hour after the event , Soni competed in the 4 × 100 @-@ meter medley relay with Natalie Coughlin , Dana Vollmer and Jessica Hardy . Performing the breaststroke leg , Soni recorded a time of 1 : 05 @.@ 35 , the fastest in the field ; the American team went on to win the gold in a time of 3 : 55 @.@ 23 .

For her performance at the Pan Pacific Swimming Championships , Soni was named the World Swimmer of the Year and American Swimmer of the Year by Swimming World Magazine .

= = = = 2010 Short Course World Championships = = = =

At the end of 2010 , Soni competed at the 2010 World Short Course Championships in Dubai , where she won three gold medals and one silver . Soni swept all the breaststroke events and individually set four championship records .

= = = 2011 = = =

= = = = 2011 World Aquatics Championships = = = =

Soni won her first gold medal in the 100 @-@ meter breaststroke . After posting the top times in the heats (1 : 05 @.@ 54) and semi @-@ finals (1 : 04 @.@ 91) , Soni recorded a time of 1 : 05 @.@ 05 in the final for the win . Her winning time was over a second ahead of second @-@ place finisher Leisel Jones . In her second event , the 200 @-@ meter breaststroke , Soni won with a time of 2 : 21 @.@ 47 , her first gold medal in the event at a long course World Championships . However , her time in the final was slightly slower than her semi @-@ final time of 2 : 21 @.@ 03 . In the 4 × 100 @-@ meter medley relay , Soni won gold with Natalie Coughlin , Dana Vollmer , and Missy Franklin with a time of 3 : 52 @.@ 36 , over three seconds ahead of second @-@ place finisher China . Swimming the breaststroke leg , Soni had a split of 1 : 04 @.@ 71 . The final time of

3 : 52 @.@ 36 for the medley relay was the second @-@ fastest effort of all time , just behind the Chinese @-@ owned world record of 3 : 52 @.@ 19 . In her last event , the 50 @-@ meter breaststroke , Soni finished in third place behind Jessica Hardy and Yuliya Yefimova .

At the year 's end , Soni was named the World Swimmer of the Year and American Swimmer of the Year by Swimming World Magazine , and defended her titles from 2010 .

= = = 2012 = = =

= = = = 2012 Olympic Trials = = = =

At the 2012 United States Olympic Trials , the U.S. qualifying meet for the Olympics , Soni qualified for the U.S. Olympic team by finishing second in the 100 @-@ meter breaststroke and first in the 200 @-@ meter breaststroke . Her second @-@ place finish in the 100 @-@ meter breaststroke also ensured her a spot on the 4 × 100 @-@ meter medley relay . In her first event , the 100 @-@ meter breaststroke , Soni placed second behind Breeja Larson , a Texas A & M swimmer , with a time of 1 : 05 @.@ 99 , only losing by seven one @-@ hundredths (0 @.@ 07) of a second . In the 200 @-@ meter breaststroke , Soni placed first with a time of 2 : 21 @.@ 13 , winning by almost two seconds .

= = = = 2012 Summer Olympic Games = = = =

At the 2012 Summer Olympics in London , Soni won her first medal , a silver , in the 100 @-@ meter breaststroke , finishing 0 @.@ 08 seconds behind 15 @-@ year @-@ old Lithuanian R?ta Meilutyt? and repeating her result from the 2008 Olympics . After topping the heats of the 200 @-@ metre breaststroke with a time of 2 : 21 @.@ 40 , and breaking Annamay Pierse 's world record in the semi @-@ finals with a time of 2 : 20 @.@ 00 , Soni won a gold medal in the final of the 200 @-@ meter breaststroke with a time of 2 : 19 @.@ 59 , breaking her own world record and becoming the first woman ever to break 2 minutes 20 seconds in the event . With her win , Soni became the first female to successfully defend her title in the event . In her final event , the 4 × 100 @-@ meter medley relay , she won gold with Missy Franklin , Dana Vollmer and Allison Schmitt . Swimming the breaststroke leg , she recorded a time of 1 : 04 @.@ 82 , and the U.S. team went on to set a new world record with a time of 3 : 52 @.@ 05 , bettering the previous Chinese @-@ owned record of 3 : 52 @.@ 19 set in 2009 .

= = = 2013 = = =

Soni took the year off to recover from a back injury , but returned to the 2013 World Aquatics Championships as a spectator . At the World Championships , her 200 @-@ meter breaststroke world record was broken by Denmark 's Rikke Møller Pedersen in the semi @-@ finals .

= = Personal bests = =

As of August 2 , 2012 .

= = World records = =

a Record set in a short course pool .

b Short course record with Natalie Coughlin , Dana Vollmer , and Missy Franklin .

c The first woman to swim in under 2 minutes 20 seconds in the event .

d Record set with Missy Franklin , Dana Vollmer , and Allison Schmitt .