

## Athletes to Watch at the Beijing Olympics: Dara Torres

Dara Torres is an American swimmer who unbelievably, has been swimming competitively at the Olympic level since 1984. Even without competing in the 1996 or 2004 Olympics, she is still going to be the first Olympic swimmer to compete in five Olympic Games. Also, it should be mentioned that she's 41 years old, and still competing at an elite level. If she swims in Beijing this summer, she will also be the oldest swimmer to ever compete at the Beijing Olympics.

Torres has become notable as a television personality outside of the pool, and was also the first non-model to appear in the Sports Illustrated annual swimsuit issue. In case you hadn't heard, she's also had a pretty good career as a swimmer.

To this point in Torres' career, she has won nine Olympic medals (four gold medals among them), and in the Sydney Olympics in 2000, she won five medals as the oldest member of the U.S. team, at 33 years old. She had originally planned to retire and had no intentions of competing in further Olympics, even devoting her time to having a family in the following years. By all accounts, the Olympic career of Dara Torres had come to a distinguished end.

However, things took a surprising turn. In August of 2007, when Torres was 40 years old and had given birth just over a year before, Torres was able to win the gold medal at the U.S. Nationals for the 100 meter freestyle event. She would also go on to break her own American record in the 50 meter freestyle.

Torres was as surprised as anyone. She had joined a local club team after giving birth, just to get back in shape and have a fun outlet for friendly competition. However, as Torres is one of the more competitive athletes of her entire sport, one thing led to another, and she began competing at a higher and higher level. She raced in master's events, but posted times that would be competitive at a professional level, surprising everyone, including herself. Since discovering that she still has the talent, she has decided to resume full-time training for the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Dara Torres' training is made a bit more complicated by the fact that she can't get as much pool work in as her younger counterparts, so she is forced to train smarter instead of harder. She works with a team of experts to ensure that there is no wasted time in her workout regimen, and she relies on weight training more than ever to increase her strength and explosiveness.

Torres' philosophy of training smarter rather than harder has led to her posting

faster times than she did years ago, even though she spends about half as much time in the pool as she used to. She is stronger than in her younger days, although she weighs less, and is more efficient and better balanced in the water. She has also improved her time out of the blocks to start the race, which is vital at shorter distances, where fractions of a second can separate a gold medal from a bronze medal.

Dara Torres is likely to be one of the biggest stories of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. Just by qualifying and competing, Torres would be making history. However, as you may guess, Torres is not merely content to just "show up".

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