

coverstory
BY GEORGE DICKIE



Caeleb Dressel vies for Team USA in swimming at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, airing all week on NBC and other outlets.

Everyone in the pool: Swimming dominates first week of 2020 Tokyo Olympics

As the 2020 Tokyo Olympics moves into its first full week of competition, swimming comes into sharp focus with a number of American athletes figuring to vie for podium space.

Probably the name most familiar to fans is Katie Ledecky. The 24-year-old Washington, D.C.-area native has a resume like few others, holding five Olympic gold medals, 15 World Championship golds, records for the 23 fastest times in the 800m freestyle (her signature event) and the 10 fastest times in the 1,500m freestyle. She's also the defending Olympic champion in the 200m and 400m freestyle.

In short, she's America's best hope for multiple hardware in Tokyo and Rowdy Gaines, a three-time Olympic gold medal swimmer who will cover the sport when it airs all week beginning Sunday, July 25, on NBC and other outlets, expects her to add to her medal collection here, though not without some stiff competition, namely in Ariarne Titmus of Australia.

"I think she's the only one that can beat Katie," Gaines says. "I really think that in the 200m, 400m and 800m, she's certainly met somebody that can go stroke for stroke with her. But I don't think we've seen the best of Katie. ... Now she's still four seconds or five seconds behind Titmus in the 400m so she's got to find a lot, but I really do believe that she can run the table from the 200m to the 1,500m if she's on like I know she can be."

On the men's side, Team USA is looking for its stud with Michael Phelps and Ryan Lochte retired from Olympic competition. Enter Caeleb Dressel, who won golds in two relay events at Rio de Janeiro in 2016 and figures to compete in as many as seven in Tokyo.

"I really believe that for the men's side, Team USA will go so far as Caeleb Dressel goes," Gaines says. "Because if he's successful, I think it will be a domino effect for the rest of those men because these are not very experienced men. ... And Caeleb is one that has certainly had the experience, knows what it's been like, knows how to compete at the highest level with the World Championships that followed. But boy, he's got a lot of pressure on his back just like Michael did all those years."

As for up-and-comers to watch, Gaines has his eye several swimmers, among them Annie Lazor, Kieran Smith, Bobby Finke and Lydia Jacoby, a 17-year-old who is the first Olympic swimmer from Alaska.

"She represents a first, for sure, which is really cool," Gaines says. "I've been to Alaska a couple of times for swim clinics, believe it or not, and they have some good swimming there. It's just that it's tough because during the outdoor season, it's hard to find an outdoor 50-meter pool that a lot of states have and they have to go indoors and there are only so many 50-meter indoor pools in Alaska. So it's really great, I think she'll help the sport a lot in that state."

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