

Sara Bertolasi's second "Olympic film"

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The retreat in **Piediluco** is about to end. At the federal centre where the Italian rowing team always prepares for the great international competitions, **Sara Bertolasi**, 28, is also getting ready to experience for the second time the thrill of competing in the **Olympic Games**, in the Italian national jersey.

"Being here, surrounded by nature and nothing else for almost one month isn't easy, but it's worth it if we think of why we're here," Sara said over the phone, after yet another morning of training. The athlete, who was born in Busto Arsizio, who grew up in the Canottieri Varese club and who is now a member of Lario, is taking part in Rio 2016, in the senior women's **coxless pairs**, with Alessandra Patelli, from Padua.

How does this time before your departure compare with 2012?

"It's like watching a film for the second time; you understand what's happening, you handle certain situations better. One example is how you interact with the press, or how you use the social networks, which we'll be practically banned from. The other time was tough, now I know how to behave."

Your teammate Alessandra Patelli is making her debut; are you going to be her "big sister"?

"A bit, yes, but only for certain, important aspects that it's only right I should tell her about. Apart from that, I hope she faces this adventure as I did, four years ago, that she has the chance to experience the surprises and joys that an event like the Games can offer."

Let's get to the boat: how are you going to arrive in Rio, from the sporting point of view?

“2016 has really been a very demanding year. We qualified for Rio in May (at the World Rowing Cup in Lucerne – **read the article**), but we’ve been training quite a lot since the winter. There was a lot of competition, both among the lanes and within, because there were several athletes who trained hard at home. The incentive to qualify also came from this; I can say I’ve never worked so hard.”

Sara and Alessandra with the World Cup medals won in Varese

What point are you at in your preparation?

“We’re doing the last few days of ‘loading’; soon, the descending phase will begin, which will bring us to Rio. Fingers crossed, apart from a few routine aches and pains, we haven’t had any problems from the physical point of view.”

You’re the only women in the Italian rowing team going to Brazil. Do you feel the pressure?

“Not pressure, but sadness. It would have been lovely to share this adventure with our teammates who have spent four years working and training with us. The Olympic Games are a great sharing experience.”

Let’s talk about goals; what could the Bertolasi-Patelli coxless pair really achieve?

“I think it’s almost impossible for us to get to the A Final; there are 7/8 teams that, only paper, deserve to qualify among the top six, and in rowing, it’s unlikely that certain predictions won’t come true. I think we’ve been called to do well in the B Final, and I’m not saying this because we haven’t worked hard enough, quite the opposite. We’ve done a great job, but there are certain physical and physiological differences. We’ll try to work as hard as we can on the details and on our ‘heads’.”

Let’s end with a few comments about the atmosphere of the Olympics. Are you going to take part in the opening ceremony?

“We still have to decide; we have time, because the first race is two days later, but, it’s close to the race. We’ll see; I’d certainly like to.”

The Olympic Games also provide an opportunity to go outside your discipline and come into contact with a lot of other athletes. How possible will this “contamination” be?

“Apart from the competing, taking part in the Games means really having the chance to meet so many people and make friendships that might be superficial at the beginning, but that become strong over time. Even during an official occasion, like handing over the Italian flags at the Quirinale, I was able to join the sailing delegation, and the synchronised swimming team. And there’ll be moments like this during the trip to Rio de Janeiro; among all the lovely things at the Olympics, there’s also this aspect.”

SARA BERTOLASI

Born: in Busto Arsizio, on 29/4/1988

Current team: Canottieri Lario

Federation: Rowing

Discipline: Women’s coxless pairs

Participation in the Olympic Games: 1 (London 2012 – 10th)

di [Damiano Franzetti](#)