

DECCAN HERALD

Gagan gets lucky as rest are left high and dry

FINA decision robs OST-attained swimmers of their dream to take part in Olympics

BANGALORE: In a surprising turn-around, the world governing body FINA has awarded a London Olympics berth to long-distance swimmer Gagan AP, ignoring the legitimate claims of four swimmers who had attained the 'B' Standard qualifying time, on Friday.

The World swimming body has gifted Karnataka's Gagan an Universality Place (normally reserved for countries to enter one male and one female swimmer if they do not have a qualified swimmer) in the 1500M freestyle (15:59.33). "FINA has informed Swimming Federation Of India (SFI) that at the end of the invitation procedure for swimmers having established Olympic Selection Time

(OST), none of the Indian swimmers has qualified for the London Olympics. Under the Universality Places, FINA confirmed swimmer Gagan, who was present in the 2011 World Championships at Shanghai, will represent India in the 2012 London Olympic Games in the 1500M freestyle," said a release from Swimming Federation of India CEO Virendra Nanavati.

Understandably the 20-year-old Gagan was over the moon when he came to know about his opportunity of representing India at the London Games. "Very very surprising," said an elated Gagan.

"I am lost for words. I am extremely happy and it's a dream-come-true for me. I completed my final year degree exams to-



Gagan AP

day and started my training again. I was disappointed when I couldn't attain the qualifying mark in the Malaysian Open in May. I am going to train hard and put up a good performance

in London," said Gagan, the final year BBM student at the Jain College.

Virdhawal Khade (100M freestyle), Sandeep Sejwal (100M breaststroke; 200M breaststroke), Aaron D'Souza (200M freestyle) and Saurabh Sangvekar (1500M freestyle) had achieved the 'B' qualification standard, technically termed OST, the minimum requirement for competing at the Olympics, with FINA's invitation.

The four swimmers should feel extremely unlucky with their years of hard work, aimed at a sole dream of competing in the Olympics, resulting in disappointment. FINA's list of 900 swimmers has 438 who attained

Olympic Qualifying Time (OQT) or the 'A' Standard time, 181 OST qualifiers, 131 relay only swimmers and 150 Universality Places, representing 166 National Federations/ National Olympic Committees in London.

Only three swimmers represented India at the world championship with two others being Khade and Sejwal. Since Khade and Sejwal had attained the 'B' Standard time or the OST mark, the duo was not eligible to get a berth under Universality Place which opened the door for Gagan.

It is debatable how FINA chose to give the Universality Places overlooking those who had attained OST.

DH News Service