



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Gagan pips them all, makes it to London

Maxin Mathew | TNN

Bangalore: In an astonishing turn of events late on Friday night, world swimming body FINA awarded Gagan AP Ullalmath of Karnataka a berth in the 1500m freestyle event at the London Olympics under the 'Universality' quota, thereby slamming the door on Viradhawal Khade, Sandeep Sejwal, Aaron D'Souza and Saurabh Sangvekar, who qualified under Olympic Selection Time (OST) criterion or the 'B' standard mark.

The 20-year-old Bangalore swimmer, who clocked a per-



OVERJOYED: Gagan Ullalmath

SWIMMING

sonal best of 15:59.33 seconds at the 7th AASF Age Group Championships in Palembang, Indonesia, last year was ecstatic. "I'm on cloud nine. This is so unreal that I cannot express it in words. I deserve this opportunity for all the hard work I have put in," the Jain University student told TOI.

A must criterion for Universality qualification is representation at the 14th FINA World Championships in Shanghai last year where Gagan clocked 8:21.23 in the 800m freestyle category.

The Universality quota is awarded to countries that have no Olympic Qualification Time (OQT) or OST qual-

ified swimmers. It is strange that FINA has awarded an invitation to India, which has four swimmers who have touched the 'B' standard mark. National coach Pradeep Kumar summed up the feeling. "Though it is great news that we finally have a representation at the Olympics, whether the move is fair or not is questionable," he said.

Until Friday evening, the scenario was bleak for the swimmers after no Indian name was present in FINA's final list of 900 participants. The list includes 438 OQT swimmers, 181 from the OST quota, 131 entries in the relay category and 150 swimmers with Universality places.

maxin.mathew@timesgroup.com