

THE TIMES OF INDIA

# Back with a golden splash

**Maxin Mathew | TNN**

**SHOW STOPPER**

**KNOW YOUR STAR**

**ACHIEVEMENTS**

**National**  
Championships: 18  
Medals: 105 (80 gold, 21 silver, 4 bronze)  
Records: 37 (Individual: 26, Relay: 11)

**International**  
Tournaments: 25  
Medals: 51 (25 gold, 12 silver, 14 bronze)

I surprised myself like this. But more importantly, I am confident that I can aspire for a podium finish at the Asiad if I can be consistent with these timings in the coming months," said the youngster, who trains under national coach S Pradeep Kumar.

For Aaron all roads now lead to Rio. "I have two more years to prove myself. Missing the cuts earlier has pumped me up to seal my place at the Rio Games. My mission this time is to aim for the Olympic Qualifying Time (OQT or 'A' qualifying mark)."

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Representing your country at the Olympics is something every sportsperson dreams of, but for Aaron D'Souza, the road to that much-coveted honour has been excruciating, if not unfortunate. Five years ago on a humid afternoon in the dusty town of Monterrey in Mexico, Aaron watched in disbelief as the display board flashed the final timings of his 200m butterfly race.

The 2008 World Junior Championships was the final qualification tournament before the Beijing Olympics and

Aaron had missed the cut for the quadrennial event by 0.75 seconds. Undeterred, Aaron braved emotional and financial constraints to put in four more years of rigorous training for London 2012.

This time, the young swimmer made the Olympic Selection Time (OST or 'B' qualifying mark), but fate once again dealt a cruel hand — FINA's confounding qualification rules robbing him of a place in the London Olympics starting line-up.

Eight years of hard work ending in failure would unsettle any talented sportsperson, but not Aaron. The 21-year-old Mangalore swimmer admits he finds it hard to bury the ghosts of the past, but is confident that Rio 2016 will be worth the wait.

"Yes, it still hurts," Aaron told *Times Sportal*. "But whatever is done, is done. There's no point feeling upset

over it now. No matter what, I'll retire an Olympian."

Aaron, who joined Railways in May this year, made a winning return after a long academic break at the recently-concluded 67th Senior Nationals in Thiruvananthapuram last week. With a total of seven gold medals (four individual, three relay), the Jain University student has trained his guns at the Asian Games and Commonwealth Games next year.

His marquee event — the 200m butterfly — saw the Basavanagudi Aquatic Club swimmer erase his former clubmate Rehan Poncha's four-year-old record to script a new time of two minutes 0.90 seconds, which was also his personal best. "The Nationals has given a boost to my preparations. The 200m butterfly win was unexpected, since I was returning after a long break. I'm happy that