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SUCCESS MANTRA, MORE COMPETITION

In absence of swimmers who can push him enough at home, Srihari looks at stint abroad ahead of Tokyo 2020

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COMPETITION brings the best out of a person. It helps athletes get ready for the bigger stage by pushing their limits. The lack of quality competition may leave one unprepared. This reality has started dawning on swimmer Srihari Nataraj. Preparing for the 2020 Olympics, the backstroke specialist is missing the kind of competition that makes him sharper.

Just 18, Srihari has already left other Indians in his category behind by a mile, improving his timings in every event. At the senior nationals, his 56.53s in 100m backstroke was a second faster than closest competitor Madhu PS (58.29s). In 200m, the gap between him and nearest rival T Sethu Manickavel in about four seconds. This has led Srihari to think that looking beyond India to test his skills is the way to go before Tokyo Olympics 2020.

Preparing for his class 12



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Srihari Nataraj,
India swimmer

board exams coming up in March, he is looking at Australia as a potential destination to better his skills. "I'm completely into studies now and training lightly. My college (Jain University) and my teacher Dr Shankar UV sir have been very

supportive. Once the exam is over, my plan is to train abroad for at least 2-3 months. In India, I can't push myself hard enough as I don't have any challenger," said the national record holder in all three backstroke events. "Australia is my

COACH FAVOURS TRAINING AT HOME

Srihari's coach AC Jairaj doesn't find training abroad especially beneficial. According to him, Srihari is good in familiar surroundings. "There have been instances when Indian swimmers have gone for training abroad but the results have not been satisfactory. I don't see the need in Srihari's case. Instead, physical training is what I'm looking at," he said.

preferred destination for training, but it's too early. I haven't yet found a source or have had the time to plan everything."

Srihari has hit a roadblock there. With no swimmer featuring in the sports ministry's Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) for 2020, his training stint abroad may not see the light of the day. His father Nataraj V, who funds his training, is retiring soon. Srihari, however, is optimistic about support from the central government scheme after a medal-laden 2018. Even this year, the Bengaluru boy has started with seven gold medals at the Khelo India Youth Games, where he bettered his own national record in 50m

backstroke, clocking 26.16s.

Abroad or not, once back in full training, Srihari targets an overall improvement to secure the 'A' qualification marks (53.85 in 100m and 1.57.5 in 200m) for the 2020 Games. At present, he is half a second off the clock in 100m 'B' (55.47) and 1.5s behind 200m 'B' (2.01.03).

"The target is to get the 'A' standard by December so that I've enough time to prepare for the Olympics. I've been working on my start, underwater turns and getting a better stroke rate. All of them are work in progress and although I've got better, I want to be consistent. Strength is another aspect I'm working on," said the youngster.