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CHLOE ESPOSITO ON HARD WORK, FAMILY SACRIFICES AND THE JOY OF MODERN PENTATHLON OLYMPIC GOLD



There was never an Olympic champion who didn't work hard. It is the degree of hard work that separates the podium from the pack, and defines the colour of the medal.

Chloe Esposito (AUS) is renowned for her relentless training regime and there can be no greater vindication of hard work than the ultimate prize of Olympic gold.

The 2016 Olympic women's champion was still smiling this morning as she met the Australian media at the Main Press Centre in Rio's Olympic Park at Barra. But there was emotion, too, especially as she was sitting beside the Australian Olympic team chef de mission Kitty Chiller, herself an Olympic modern pentathlon and a woman who has played a big role in this incredible success story.



Esposito has not only worked punishingly hard in the

four years since she finished 7th at the London Olympics, aged only 20, she has also made sacrifices along with her brother Max, her father Daniel and mother Suzanne. The family spent two years living in Budapest, one of the global hotbeds of Fencing and a more convenient base for competitions than their native Australia. For Chloe, it meant being separated from her fiancé, who she will marry in Australia in six months' time.

So many tough decisions have been vindicated in spectacular style in the past 48 hours in Rio.

"Fencing was my weakness, and that's the discipline I was trying to improve on a lot since London," said Chloe as she reflected on her performance at the Games, which was a demonstration of pure consistency. "When it came to the Combined Event, I know that I usually jump up a few places in the Combined but I didn't want to think about that, I tried to think of it as just another training session, only with a few more lights and cameras.

"I've done it a thousand times before, so I just tried to remember that and it all worked out and fell into place. After each event I looked at my score but I didn't look at my position. When it came to the Combined, I didn't know until 25 minutes before where I was.

"It was so nice having all my family here – my sister, fiancé, Mum and Dad and my grandparents who came as well. It was lovely having their support.

"The hard work has all paid off. You hear other countries at competitions saying 'oh, the Espositos, they train so crazy, they do too much' and this kind of stuff, but it has paid off. I'm not trying to sound big-headed or anything, but I know that Max and I train harder than any other pentathlete and I'm just so glad that it all paid off."

So how exactly did the move to Budapest work? There was a critical factor in this process: Daniel Esposito, and his own experience as an athlete who reached the Olympics in Los Angeles in 1984 thanks to the same sacrifices that his children are now making.



“After London I decided that if I wanted to go well in Rio, I

would have to improve my Fencing,” said Chloe. “I went to Barcelona for a year, but it really wasn’t the best decision and I came home and decided with Dad that if I really wanted to improve my Fencing we should move overseas as a team. Dad had lived in Hungary before and had a few contacts there, and Fencing is very strong in Budapest.

“It’s also closer to competitions, so we moved over to Budapest and got a Hungarian fencing coach, and I fenced four times a week for two hours with all the other Hungarian fencers. It changed my tactics, and also my mental attitude because in London and before, I struggled to deal with having a lot of defeats – I would just go down and I couldn’t get out of that hole.

“In the last few years, I’ve really focused on being able to take a few defeats and say ‘it doesn’t matter’ and focus on the next one.

“It’s back to Australia now, for a while. I’m getting married in six months so I’ve got to plan a wedding. I think we’ll have a celebration when we get back to Australia, because I’ve got a big family – I’ve got 21 cousins and we are all really close.”

She reserved plenty of praise for Kitty Chiller, one of the lynchpins of the Australian Modern Pentathlon community, which now has a new role model and the perfect poster girl.

“It’s been a tough four years since London and Max and I have trained so hard. But it has been a whole team effort and Kitty has been there for us since the beginning. She is someone to talk to, to call and have a chat because she has been through it all before. Her support has been amazing.”

Both Chloe and her team chef de mission had tears in their eyes as they reflected on the journey they have shared.

“I’m sorry I’m getting emotional, but I know how hard these kids have worked,” said Kitty Chiller. I know how hard the whole family has worked, how much they have sacrificed and invested in this. Everything we set out this team to be, in terms of pride, humility, excellence – the whole Esposito family has exhibited that from day one.

"I've known Daniel a long time and I competed with him 35 years ago. I've known the family for a long time and I've followed the journey of Daniel and Chloe and Max. They remain humble – this won't change Chloe and it won't change any of them. I think the smile will be even bigger than it is now.

"It's just the epitome of what an Olympian, an Olympic champion, is. From a personal level, I had to wait 18 years to be able to go to the Olympic Games as a Modern Pentathlete until women were allowed in at Sydney 2000, and that was a huge honour for me to be able to do that.

"So for me to see a family that I care so much about win Australia's first Olympic medal in Modern Pentathlon, it's absolutely incredible."