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Chasing gold

CATE & BRONTE CAMPBELL

Words: Erin Delahunty

Little sisters have a habit of making nuisances of themselves — just ask Aussie swim superstar Cate Campbell.

The 24-year-old is heading to Rio for her third Olympics knowing her sister, training partner, house mate and best friend, 22-year-old Bronte — the reigning 50m and 100m freestyle world champion — is probably the only person who can beat her in her pet events — the 50m and 100m freestyle.

But 186cm Cate, the 100m freestyle Commonwealth champion, has a plan. In the fine tradition of siblings everywhere, she will just ignore Bronte. “Bronte is my sister right up until the moment we walk on to the pool deck to compete ... then for

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CATE CAMPBELL

the next three minutes or so, until our race is finished, she ceases to exist to me. Once we touch that wall,

she’s back into existence and I can give her a hug and tell her I love her,” Cate says

It’s not just her sister that gets Cate’s psychological cold shoulder; none of the other competitors exist either.

“Swimming is an individual sport. I have to focus on my race and getting the best out of myself. I don’t care if it’s my sister or anyone else swimming in the lane next me,” Cate says, in stark contrast to the pair’s close, and seemingly drama-free, relationship.

Out of the pool, the pair are inseparable, living together in a flat in Brisbane, in walking distance to their pool, and training together virtually every day. They have competed against each other since childhood. →

ACT



Best of friends and Swisse Olympic ambassadors, Cate and Bronte Campbell.
Photo: Swisse

It's bad luck — or maybe good genetics — that means Cate has to beat her "tough and incredibly smart" 179cm sister if she wants to win her first individual Olympic gold at the August 5-21 Games.

Not that Cate's trophy cabinet is empty. She burst on to the world swimming scene as a 16-year-old at the Beijing Olympics in 2008, where she won two bronze medals, in the 50m freestyle and 4x100m freestyle relay. She won Olympic gold as

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part of the 4x100m freestyle relay in London in 2012, gold in the 100m and silver in the 50m at the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow.

Cate grabbed bronze in the 100m free at last year's world titles in Russia, behind Bronte, who she teamed up with to take out gold in the 4x100m freestyle relay at the same meet.

The older Campbell clocked a world-class 52.38 seconds, just shy

of her 52.33sec personal best and the 52.07sec world record held by German Britta Steffen, to win the 100m free final at the recent Olympic trials in Adelaide and qualified for Rio just ahead of Bronte.

Bronte has three Commonwealth medals from Glasgow in 2014; a silver in the 100m, bronze in the 50m and gold in the world record-setting 4x100m freestyle relay team. In London in 2012, at Bronte's first Games, she and Cate became the first Australian siblings in 40 years to compete at the same Olympics. If they go one-two in the most prized event, the 100m, in Rio, they will be the first sisters in history to do so.

Cate and Bronte, the eldest two of five siblings, were born in the landlocked African nation of Malawi to South African parents. Jenny, a synchronised swimmer, and Eric, a keen sailor.

They grew up learning to watch for hippos when they swam in Malawi's biggest lake and moved to Australia in 2001, settling in Brisbane when Cate was nine and Bronte was seven.

They found swimming at the local pool in Indooroopilly was their way to fit in in a new country. And after

showing early promise, they were introduced to coach Simon Cusack, who is still their coach, and the rest is history. From the start, it's been a double act — but with surprisingly little sibling rivalry.

"We're actually lucky, I think, to have each other. It's someone to motivate you, to push you that bit harder or to catch if they go past you in the pool," Cate says.

"It's been so great to have Bronte by my side, going toe to toe with me. She is so good to have in training, she can always find a little part of herself to push herself further and that helps me dig deeper in trying to keep up with her."

Bronte says they keep each other on track. "It's a pretty special job we have, and to do it with my sister by my side is amazing and it's certainly a lot less isolating than swimming can sometimes be, when you have each other," she says.

Cate admits to falling into stereotypical "big sister mode" with Bronte at times. "Even though I try not to be that overprotective sister, it sometimes creeps in. I always seem to be the sensible one, the killjoy!" ➔



Bronte's occasional impatience and Cate's inability to put folded washing away are the only attributes that irritate the other. The list of qualities they admire is much longer.

"Bronte is so tough, tougher than me, she's incredibly determined and so smart; I wish I could steal a couple of her brain cells. She's also incredibly loyal. Of all the people in the world, I would want her to have my back," says Cate.

Bronte will have her sister's back on the first night of competition in Rio, when she joins her in the 4x100m freestyle relay; an event that doesn't require them emotionally detaching from each other.

"I think every young kid dreams about going to the Olympics," Cate says. "For us, I don't think we ever planned to swim in the same event, but thanks to shared genes, that's what happened. And now we're here. What an amazing thing to be able to represent our country together, to walk out on the pool deck together, excited, ready to swim together, not against each other. Can't wait."

Nor can Australia. [W](#)

10 THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW ABOUT THE CAMPBELL SISTERS



1 Cate and Bronte were born in Malawi and were home-schooled until they moved to Australia in 2001.



2 They are the eldest of five children. They have two sisters, Jessica and Abigail and a brother, Hamish, who is severely disabled, with cerebral palsy.



3 Their South African-born mother, Jenny, was an elite synchronised swimmer, but never competed at the Olympics as South Africa was banned because of apartheid.

4 The sisters competed in a national synchronised swimming championships in Malawi in primary school, coming third and fourth – in a field of four.



5 At the 2012 London Games, they were the first sisters to represent Australia at an Olympics in 40 years.

6 The first time they shared a podium for an individual event was at last year's world titles, when Bronte won gold and Cate took out bronze in the 100m freestyle.

7 The family has a pet pig named Pepper, which the girls used to walk when they lived at home.

8 They both had their wisdom teeth taken out at the same time last year.

9 They share a favourite band – UK rock outfit Muse.

10 Cate went into the Olympic trials in April with a strained wrist she hurt during an "aggressive" nap. She still qualified fastest in the 100m freestyle.

