

High EXPECTATIONS

The Olympic buzz around Eleanor Patterson is huge, and for good reason, though this teen isn't letting it distract her. By Erin Delahunty



Eleanor Patterson flies at last year's world titles in Beijing.

While many regard her as one of Australia's best medal chances in Rio, teenage high jumper Eleanor 'Floss' Patterson isn't buying into the hype.

She says qualifying for her first Olympics is simply a tick in a box. All she wants to do is "jump high".

Patterson, 20, who won gold at the 2014 Commonwealth Games and continues to train with her coach of eight years, David Green, in her home town of Leongatha in country Victoria, says she's "just looking to improve".

"It's great to have qualified; exciting I guess, to have ticked that box off, but it's all about the preparation now, training really hard and consistently. I just want to jump high," she says.

Patterson secured her ticket to Brazil by winning her fourth consecutive national title in early April, after she also starred at an IAAF World Challenge event in Melbourne in March, where she attempted a career-best 1.97m, but narrowly missed.

"My domestic season was not too bad. I would have liked to have jumped higher, but it's definitely spurred me on to work even harder, to leave no stone unturned, as I prepare for the Olympics," says Patterson, who is the cousin of AFL stars Jarryd and Jordan Roughead.

A poor showing at last year's world titles in Beijing — won by Russian young gun Maria Kuchina with 2.01m, and where Patterson finished eighth — is also driving the teen, who will be one of the youngest members of the Aussie team.

"I was definitely disappointed with my performance, because I know I am capable of jumping higher," says Patterson, who has signed on as a Swisse Olympic ambassador.

"It was a big learning curve."

Her best jump is 1.96m, just 2cm under the Australian record held by West Australians Vanessa Browne-Ward and Alison Inverarity.

Patterson reached the mark at a schools championships in Townsville in 2013, aged 17.

The world record of 2.09m was set in 1987 by Russian Stefka Kostadinova. Anna Chicherova, also Russian, is the defending Olympic champion with 2.05m.

Patterson, who finished high school last year and is training full-time, isn't wasting energy wondering if her fiercest rivals for a medal will even be at the Games. (After a World Anti-Doping Agency investigation last year revealed state-backed doping, Russia's track and field squad is fighting to have a ban from international competition lifted before Rio.)

"Anything can happen at big meets and lots of athletes, including me, are capable of jumping high at different times. In some ways, the Olympics is just like any other competition. I need to do what I've always done."

As for the high expectations — including from Browne-Ward, who says Patterson is capable of clearing 2m — she remains unmoved.

"That sort of stuff doesn't bother me. People can believe what they believe. I know how much work my coach and I have put in ... it's immense and I have full faith in what we're doing." 



Main photo: Swisse