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Story Headline: Syrian refugee Yusra Mardini selected for the Refugee Olympic Team at the Olympic Games Rio 2016

Date: 3 June 2016

Place: Berlin, Germany

STORY SCRIPT

Ten months after fleeing the Syrian capital of Damascus, Syrian refugee swimmer Yusra Mardini has been selected together with nine fellow refugees to be part of the Refugee Olympic Team (ROT) at the Olympic Games Rio 2016. The composition of the team was officially announced by the IOC today.

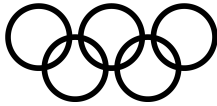
The 18 year-old will now represent the ROT - which will join the other teams of the 206 National Olympic Committees (NOCs) competing in Rio. The team was created by the IOC Executive Board in March as a symbol of hope for refugees worldwide.

Mardini, who represented Syria at the short-course World Championships in Turkey in 2012, fled the conflict in her home country along with sister Sarah in August 2015 and now resides in Germany.

Now settled in Berlin, Mardini revealed the emotions she'll feel when she walks out in the Maracanã stadium at the opening ceremony on 5 August.

"I think I will think about my family and my coach, my friends and everyone who's helped me and I will think how proud I am that I did it and I will try and go back.

"A lot of sports people haven't done that and a lot of sports people don't have the power for that so I'm quite proud and I think I will be crying, too."



Refugee athletes had to reach specific sporting standards and have official refugee status verified by the United Nations (UN) to be in contention to be part of the ROT – the first of its kind. They will march with the Olympic flag immediately before host nation Brazil at the Opening Ceremony and will have their own welcoming ceremony in the Olympic Village.

Mardini is focused on the competition ahead.

She said: “When you’re an athlete you do not think if you’re Syrian, or from London or Germany you just think about your race and you have your lane, your swimming cap, your swimming clothes and that’s it.”

Preparing to travel to Rio is a stark contrast to the situation faced when she left her Syrian home in August 2015.

Having travelled to Lebanon and then Turkey, Mardini and several members of her family endured a potentially life-threatening passage to the Greek Island of Lesbos before beginning their journey across numerous European borders before arriving in Germany.

With her place at the Rio Games now confirmed, Mardini is clear of the goals she hopes to achieve.

“I think if I have one medal I will want to take more medals because when you reach something you want one more thing but this is my goal and this is my dream to get a gold Olympic medal and after that it’s okay I’ll leave swimming!”

The Games of the XXXI Olympiad will be held from 5 to 21 August 2016. Approximately 10,500 athletes from more than 200 countries will compete in 28 sports, comprising 98 medal events.