

From Swimming to Rowing: The German Athlete Closest to Gold



Among the athletes on the German Olympic Team, Oliver Zeidler is one of the athletes who is expected to take home a gold medal. Oliver, with such high hopes riding on his shoulders, is not only large in size (203cm), but has an impressive presence when he competes. He took first place in the singles skull event at this year's World Cup, and won the European Championships held in northern Italy.

You may think from this that he has always been a competitive rowing athlete, but that is not the case.

His father was a World Junior Boat Champion, and his uncle, Matthias Ungemach (top photo, far left), was a World Cup Champion in the 1990 eight event, and 1991 four event. His Aunt, Judith Zeidler, competed with the East German team and won gold in the eight event at the 1988 Seoul Olympics. His grandfather (bottom photo, center) was a gold medalist in the 1972 Munich Olympics, where his team was referred to as the "Bull Four" for their incredible physical strength.

I still remember the overwhelming enthusiasm during that period. Oliver, a once in a generation genius (still young at the time) chose swimming over rowing. Apparently, the reason for this is that his boat flipped over the first time he tried rowing.



Oliver established himself as a strong swimmer, winning his age bracket twice in the German Swimming Championships, and making it to the semifinals of the European Youth Championships in the 100 meter crawl event. Following the Rio Olympics, his swimming club's team was disbanded, and he picked up rowing. He surely got all kinds of advice from his family.

He had already developed his stamina through swimming. His 2+ meter build was already a major advantage, and on top of that, he had an inherent ambition and determination due to his birth into a family of athletes. Of course, he still had to learn how to row. The movements required for rowing are incredibly difficult.

After transitioning to rowing, he soon began to show results. In just three years, he went from novice to world champion. He was trained by his father, aided by his grandfather, and in 2017, entered his first Regatta followed by the World Cup a year later. In 2019, he won the European Championships, followed by the World Cup. His rowing career has taken off at an unbelievable pace.



Rowing is a relatively minor sport in Germany. The only time the general public hears about rowing is after an athlete wins an international tournament. Even the greatest rowing athlete will not receive the money or attention of soccer or tennis players. Even with funding and sponsorships, one cannot make a living as a rowing athlete. They must also hold a job at the same time.

As spectators, the smooth rhythm with which they row may look simple, but it is the result of long, intense training. Rowing athletes push their bodies to the limit every day, every month, every year. They do not practice in a comfortable gymnasium, but outside on the water, rain or shine. In the summer, there is nothing to protect them from the searing sun, and in the winter, nothing to protect them from the dry air and piercing cold.

So why grind away and sacrifice yourself, while those around you enjoy their lives? Is it not to push yourself further, fulfill your goals, and bask in the glory of victory?

To be able to stand at the top of the Olympic podium, and say that you are the best in the world, is an incredible thing. This absolute victory makes up for all of the sacrifices. Those who desire victory gather from all corners of the world once every 4 years, and compete peacefully with one another at the Olympics. Even after many months of struggle due to the ongoing pandemic, this will not change.

We are all cheering for Oliver Zeidler to emerge victorious at the Sea Forest Waterway on July 30th!

Video: [Skull – Part 6: Intensive Training](#) (German)

(Osaka-Kobe Consulate General Deputy Head of Mission - Uwe Meerkötter)