

Written by John Crumlish

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Celebrating his 24th birthday on November 17, Swiss gymnast **Benjamin Gischarde** has important goals for the coming year that include competing at his second Olympic Games and making apparatus finals after two close calls at the 2016 Rio Games.

Gischarde, a Zurich native, competed on four apparatuses at the '14 World Championships in Nanning, where Switzerland placed seventh. At the '16 Olympic Games in Rio, where Switzerland placed ninth, he finished 12th on floor exercise and 12th on vault. He was 11th on floor exercise at the '18 Worlds in Doha, where Switzerland placed sixth. Gischarde helped Switzerland earn a team berth to next summer's Tokyo Olympics by virtue of its seventh-place finish at last month's World Championships in Stuttgart.

At the Swiss Championships held a month before Worlds, Gischarde placed third all-around behind gold medalist **Oliver Hegi** and silver medalist **Pablo Braegger**, as well as first on floor exercise, first on vault and third on pommel horse. Hegi and Braegger went on to finish 23rd and 15th, respectively, in the all-around final in Stuttgart.

Gischarde has proven himself to be a reliable team performer, but he has also earned individual international accolades. He won the bronze medal on vault at the '16 Challenge Cup of Cottbus, and bronze medals on floor exercise and vault at the '18 Challenge Cup of Koper. Gischarde was sixth on vault at the '15 European Championships in Montpellier, and eighth on vault at the '16 Europeans in Bern, where Switzerland won the team bronze. He placed fourth on floor exercise and fifth on vault at this spring's European Championships in Szczecin.

Gischarde shares his perspectives and hopes in this IG Online interview.

**IG:** With so many teams at the same level in Stuttgart, what do you think were the reasons that

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Switzerland was able to earn one of the coveted team berths for Tokyo?

**BG:** I think it was due to the consistency in our preparation and the hard work in the gym. We are a bunch of good gymnasts and only the five best can go to the World Championships, so we have a strong rivalry that pushes us to our limits and we have to give our best also in the training. At the same time, we are all good friends and team players. We all live in the same house and are really close friends. The mix is perfect for us. No one has time to relax too long because otherwise some of the younger generation takes your place on the team.

**IG:** Now that your team has qualified for Tokyo, what do you think your team will need to qualify for the team final there?

**BG:** We are really hungry. We want by all means to qualify for the final. We had a chance in 2016 (Olympic Games) but we failed. Now that we are given a second chance I'm sure everybody will give his best to profit from this opportunity. We need to work exactly in the same way we did for the World Championships. We've learned a lot from our mistakes in 2016. Now we know that we have to take our time to take breaks and to train hard. In 2016, we worked a little bit too hard. In other words, we didn't take enough breaks so that we were already a bit tired on the competition day. Furthermore, we were very nervous but now we have much more experience in the whole team and we are ready.

**IG:** At Rio 2016 you came very close to making the floor and vault finals. What changes and improvements have you made, or will you make, in order to make those finals in Tokyo?

**BG:** I've changed a lot on floor since 2016. My D-(difficulty) score is higher and, at the moment, I'm learning two or three new upgrades. My goal is to adapt my floor routine to my current power. If I feel the floor or have really strong legs I will do a 6.4 and if I have weak legs I will just perform a 6.0. My new elements are Zapata double piked  $\frac{1}{2}$ , double back with 2- $\frac{1}{2}$  twists and double twist forward to 1- $\frac{1}{2}$  twist forward. This enables me to vary my D-score between 6.0 and 6.4. On vault I'm learning a Roche and my goal is to compete Dragulescu or Yeo 2. The second one I already competed at several competitions but I stopped because I'm not sure yet which one I will compete. My second vault will be the Driggs and it has to be a very clean one if I want to get into the final.

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**IG:** Although you competed on three apparatuses in Stuttgart, what aspirations do you have for competing all-around in Tokyo?

**BG:** At home in Switzerland I always train on the six apparatuses. I know that I have to compete on all the six apparatuses in Tokyo so I'm aware of the work to be done. On parallel bars and high bar I'm not good enough for the Swiss team but I can generate good values on floor, vault and pommel horse. So I really hope that I can compete on the team and do all-around in Tokyo. I've already showed the federation that I can compete all-around. At the Swiss Championships I was third place in 2019, and in 2018 I was second. This makes me confident that I can be one of the four best all-arounders in Switzerland. I have to give my best in the gym and improve on high bar, p-bars and also rings because we, Team Switzerland, are not the best on rings. This has to be improved by the Olympics.

**IG:** The competition within the Swiss team is already tough because your team has several good all-arounders. What will you need in order to earn a spot on the team in Tokyo?

**BG:** My job is to improve my D-score on high-bar and p-bars in order to achieve an average score so that I could secure the team if someone came off an apparatus. On rings I have to improve my strength so that I can generate an end score of 14.00. The weakness of the Swiss team is rings. If I can show the coaches that I'm able to get a good score on rings, pommel horse, floor and vault and secure the team with an average but not very high value on high bar and p-bars, I have real chances to earn a spot on the team. I really have to make the points on floor, pommel, rings and vault, and be one of the best at those apparatuses in Switzerland, so that I become interesting for the team.

Read complete coverage of the 2019 World Championships in the November 2019 issue of International Gymnast magazine, available now.

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