

David Boudia Reconnects With Diving

April 07, 2021

Image not found or type unknown



After the Olympic Games Rio 2016, Team Toyota athlete David Boudia was at a crossroads in his diving career. His mindset about the sport was off, prompting talk of retirement. And then, he suffered a significant concussion in 2017. But instead of walking away from it all, Boudia transitioned from platform to springboard.

“Obviously the circumstances surrounding my decision — with my concussion — weren’t ideal,” says Boudia. “But when I started training again after Rio, I had been asking myself, ‘Why am I doing this?’ I hated going to practice.”

Changing events helped Boudia find his place in the diving world again.

“Since switching to the 3-meter [springboard], I’m excited to train,” says Boudia, who had been feeling the pressure to stop competing at an elite level following three successful Olympic Games and four medals.

Both diving events are extremely technical, and the 3-meter requires more power from the athlete to achieve the necessary height. He is now training exclusively for the 3-meter, both as an individual and synchronized with his partner, Steele Johnson.

“Switching it up has been a kind of new, fun, exciting regenerate to my diving career,” he says. “It’s a new journey for me and I’m still learning along the way.”

Getting Back in Sync

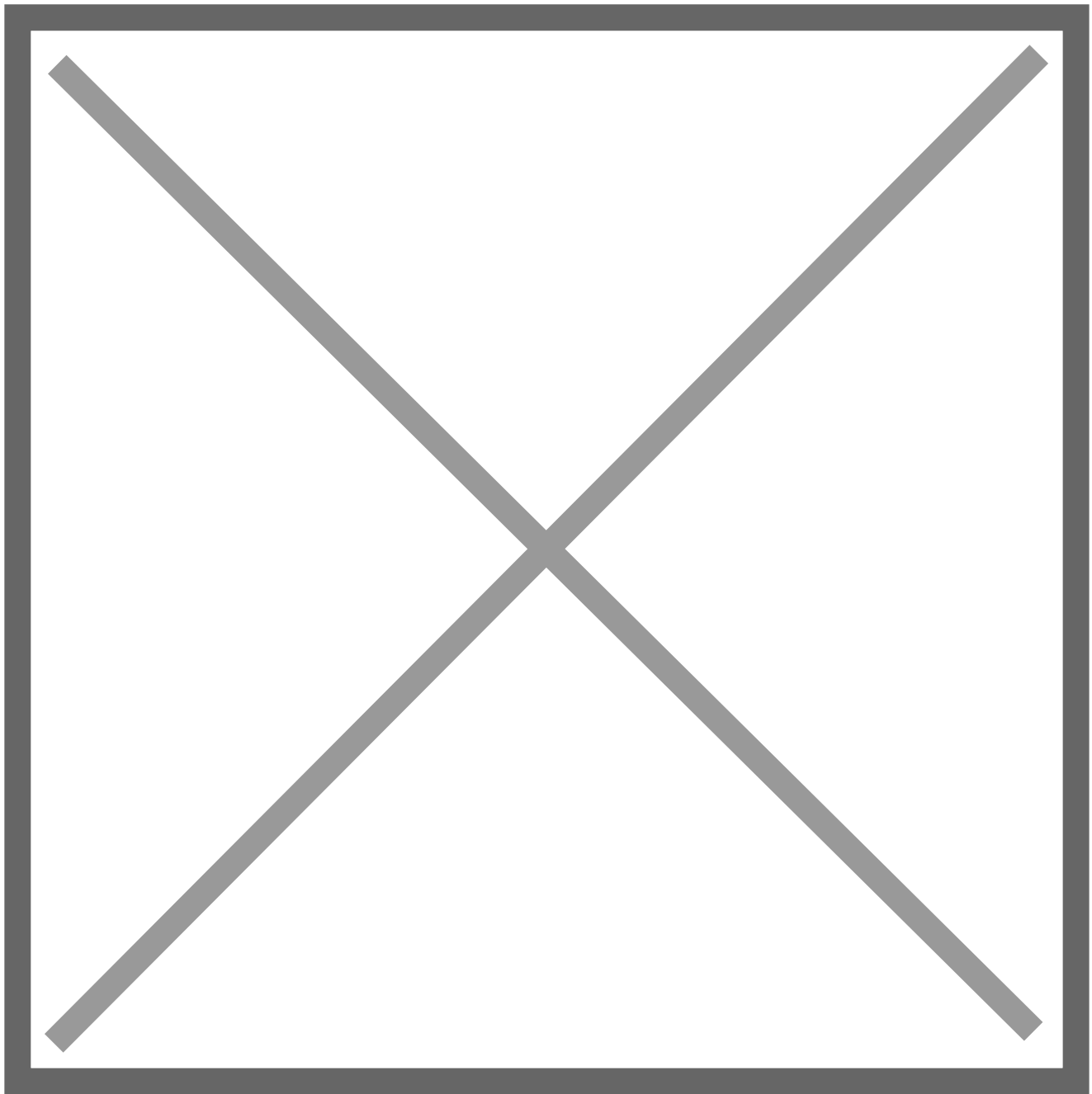
Boudia competed at the collegiate level throughout his time at Purdue University before making the Olympic team for the first time in 2008 for 10-meter platform and 10-meter synchronized. Boudia won his first gold medal at the Olympic Games London 2012 in the individual and a bronze in the 10-meter synchro with then-partner Nicholas McCrory. In Rio, Boudia competed with Johnson, his current partner, and the pair won silver in the 10-meter synchro.

Boudia and Johnson first started diving together in the synchronized 10-meter in 2014 and started training for the 3-meter synchro in August 2019. Because the athletes are familiar with one another’s diving styles, it was much easier for the team to get back into training again, even in a new event. Plus, they’d already built the foundation of trust that is crucial in synchro.

“Individually, you don’t have to rely on anybody else but yourself, so whether you win or lose is just dependent on how well you do during your six dives,” he says. “In synchro, you’re relying on somebody else to do the best dive they can.”

In competition, Olympic divers each perform six dives. The combined score determines whether the pair or individual advances to the next round, so the pressure intensifies with each dive.

“As you get to the last dive, the competition builds,” he says. “You’re putting a lot of trust in your partner, trusting that they can handle that pressure. Since I know that Steele is really strong, it makes handling my own dive a lot easier.”



Adapting to the Springboard

According to Boudia, it's relatively common for divers to compete in one or two Olympics in platform and then transition to springboard, yet he was hesitant to make the switch.

"I dove the 3-meter back in college," he says. "I think because I was having so much success with the 10-meter, I just kept sticking with what was comfortable."

Though a seasoned Olympian, preparing for Tokyo feels a little different for Boudia from his other experiences. He has the body awareness to execute the dive, but now, something's moving under his feet.

“With the 10-meter, you have a bit more room for error,” he says. “The 3-meter is definitely intense because you have to be powerful and graceful — you take one wrong step and it costs you the meet.”

The Mental Game

At a certain level of competition, Boudia believes that diving becomes less a physical game and more a mental one.

“With the 10-meter, the biggest thing is fear,” he says. “You’re jumping off what is essentially a three-story building, 33 feet in the air. Whereas with springboard, the mental aspect comes from, ‘Am I going to get the lift I need?’ Because if you don’t, your dive is not going to go well.”

To help him prepare mentally, Boudia credits his longtime coach Adam Soldati for making his mental health a priority and acting as his mentor, both in and out of the pool. In addition to Soldati and Johnson, the Olympian can always look to his wife, Sonnie, and three children to stay motivated.

“Whether I’ve had a good practice or a bad practice, I still get the same welcome home where they run to the door yelling, ‘Daddy!’” he says. “It’s like whatever happened at practice an hour ago doesn’t matter, because I have my family here. They care about me as a diver, but they care more about me as a dad and a husband.”

Boudia doesn’t know if he’ll ever be fully prepared for the excitement and nerves that come with the training, but he knows his family will be there to help him through it as he aims for his fourth Olympic Games.

“When I look at Tokyo 2020, it seems daunting,” he says. “I think the hardest thing is making sure that I don’t get overwhelmed by everything and maintain a positive outlook. Adam, my wife, and family help me so much with that — I’m grateful to have that support system.”

