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**Adlington
gold gives**

Sweetenham last laugh

Adlington secures gold with stunning swim

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By JAMES TONEY

BILL SWEETENHAM could allow himself a smug and satisfied smile as Rebecca Adlington rewrote swimming history this morning.

The teenager's 400 metre freestyle gold ended a 40-year run without a British woman swimmer taking Olympic gold.

Sweetenham, the brusque Australian taskmaster who quit British Swimming earlier this year after a series of bust-ups, was one of Adlington's closest advisors.

He spotted her potential from a young age and carefully eased her through the system, ev

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en making the decision not to select her for the last Commonwealth Games.

"I know that Bill has worked very hard with Becky and driven her very hard for the last 18 months but that has clearly paid off," said Anita Lonsborough, who won Britain's last woman's swimming gold at the 1960 Olympics in Rome.

"Bill has come in and he's taken a lot of criticism for shaking things up but a lot of respect must go for what he has done for British swimming."

Adlington was still struggling to come to terms with her sudden celebrity just hours after touching home for gold ahead of American Katie Hoff and British team-mate and best-mate Joanne Jackson.

And the news gets even better – this wasn't even her best event, with the 800m freestyle later this week predicted to be her top medal chance.

"It hasn't sunk in, I'm just in total shock," she said.

"You spend your life working towards something like this and dreaming of being Olympic champion. It's just amazing."

Britain hadn't won a women's swimming medal in 24 years and eight years ago our swimmers left the Sydney Olympics without a single medal, prompting one wag to joke: 'at least no-one drowned'.

This morning British Swimming officials were wearing self-satisfied grins, with six days of pool competitions still to come.

"It's absolutely amazing to have two British girls on the medal podium and the fact that Jo is my best friend makes it all the more special," added Adlington.

"I've got two more events coming up and I can go into both of them with a lot of confidence.

"Our 4x200m relay team is looking amazing in training and now I can't wait to get into that race and hopefully get up there again.

"The 800m is a completely different event so I don't know quite what will happen but I'll be giving it my all again."

Adlington was more than a second behind silver medallist and hot favourite, America's Katie Hoff, with just 50m remaining. But she summoned the strength to produce a storming final length, beating Hoff by just seven hundredths of a second in a time of 4.03.22.

"The race was completely different to how we planned but I felt really confident going in," added Adlington. "I'm not a swimmer who likes to be out the front and I'm naturally suited to back end of the race.

"I couldn't see anyone apart from Katie and I just tried to focus on her; the prospect of gold seemed to give me some extra energy when I really needed it."

Adlington paid tribute to her parents, Kay and Steve, and sisters Laura and Chloe, who were watching back home in Mansfield.

They aren't due in Beijing until later this week, after booking their tickets to watch Adlington in the 800m in which she is ranked World No.1 this season.

And that trip nearly didn't happen, after they fell victim to an internet ticket scam that cost them over £1000.

"I've so many people to thank – my parents, my sisters, all my family, all my coaches, all my team-mates. I'd never have achieved this without their support," added Adlington.

"When I rang home there were about 16 people in my living room and they were all screaming."

Just two years ago the 19-year old was left downcast after she failed to be selected for England's Commonwealth Games team.

But she's used the disappointment to steadily lower her personal best and establish herself among the world's elite distance swimmers. And today's double medal haul could provide a valuable slingshot to hopes in the days ahead. Britain's swimmers returned from Athens with a paltry collection of just two bronzes, but with several podium hopes still to come, the bounty from Beijing could be impressive.

"British swimming is moving in the right direction, this is the best team we've ever had and we are a nation to look out for now," added Adlington.

Meanwhile, Scotland's Caitlin McClatchey qualified from heat five of the 200m freestyle in second place, behind Sara Isakovic of Slovenia.

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