

London bound Pistorius already dreaming of Rio

By Mitch Phillips

LONDON, July 17 (Reuters) - After striving to qualify for the 400 metres at the London Olympics for six years, Oscar Pistorius believes he will now be better placed to run at the Rio de Janeiro Games in 2016.

The South African, who wears carbon fibre blades, will become the first double amputee to compete in the Olympics. He reached the 400 metres individual competition despite failing to register the A standard qualifying because he was selected for the country's 4x400 relay team.

"I was very lucky that they did take a couple of athletes who had just missed the A qualification within the past couple of weeks. I was very blessed and I believe I will do the best and represent my country well in London," Pistorius told Laureus.com in a break from training in Italy.

"Not making the qualification criteria was pretty tough. I was hoping and sure that I would be on the relay team but the 400 metres individual was something that I had always wanted to be on.

"I ran the qualification very comfortably last year and then opening up this season, in my first race, I ran a very strong qualification time but when I came to Europe I was just struggling a bit. I had a niggle with my hip and it was amazing how that set me back in the first couple of races."

"Finally when the team was selected, knowing that I have made the individual and relay was just a dream come true and a massive blessing. It has been six years of a lot of hard work and sacrifice from our end, not only from me, but from my team and now I have to be thinking about performing at a higher level."

At the world championships in Daegu last year, Pistorius reached the semi-finals in the 400 and ran the opening leg in the 4x400 relay heats. He helped South Africa to reach the final where, having dropped "Bladerunner", they took the silver medal.

"My targets for the Olympic Games would be to make the semi-final (in the individual)," he said.

"I think a realistic goal and a tough goal would be for me to finish in a better position in the semi."

Pistorius finished last in his Daegu semi.

"The relay team is a little bit different to what we had last year," he added. "Some of the guys have been struggling a bit with injuries so we will go in with a fair set of challenges, but I know that they have got a lot of heart," he said.

Pistorius, 25, is likely to lead the relay team off again in London after contradictory messages from the sport's governing body about whether he would be able to run any other leg, when he would have to share a lane with other athletes and his carbon fibre prosthetics could be a danger.

Despite devoting so many years of his life to trying to make the London Games, Pistorius says they might have come a little early in his development and that his best might be on show in four years' time in Brazil.

"I would love to obtain the goals that I have set out for myself which are going to be a great challenge. I think 2016 in Rio de Janeiro will be where I will be at my pinnacle as a sprinter," he said.

"Most sprinters peak between 27 and 29 and I will be 29 in Rio so hopefully I can work towards that and I am as keen and as excited as I have ever been."