

Downing to carry Canadian flag at opening ceremonies

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SHENZHEN, China (CIS) – Swimmer MacKenzie Downing, a native of Whitehorse, Yukon, was announced Thursday evening as Canada's flag-bearer for the 2011 Summer Universiade opening ceremonies.

Canadian chef de mission Peter Baxter and Mr. Francis Huot, acting consul general at Consulate General of Canada in Guangzhou, made the announcement at a Team Canada reception at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Shenzhen's Longgang district.

The 26th World University Games will officially get under way Friday night when athletes and officials from over 150 countries – including a record-setting 349 Canadians – march into the main stadium of the Shenzhen Bay Sports Center.



Downing, who starred for the University of Victoria Vikes during an exceptional Canadian Interuniversity Sport career, is about to appear in her third FISU Games. After making her Universiade debut in 2005 in Izmir, Turkey, she claimed three medals in 2007 in Bangkok, Thailand, including gold in the 100-metre butterfly, silver in the 200 fly and bronze in the 4x100 medley relay.

Over the years, she has also represented Canada at many international competitions including, among others, the 2006 Pan Pacific championships in Victoria, the 2007 FINA world championships in Australia, as well as the Pan Pacific Games in California and the Commonwealth Games in India, both in 2010. At the 2007 Worlds, she reached the semifinals in the 100 butterfly and helped the women's 4x100 medley relay set a Canadian record.

During her UVic career, Downing was twice named the school's athlete of the year and racked up an impressive 21 CIS championship medals.

In Shenzhen, the 24-year-old, a long-time member of the Whitehorse Glacier Bears and now a member of the Victoria Academy of Swimming, is set to compete individually in the 200 fly on August 18 and may also take part in a relay event.

"This is truly an exceptional honour," said the seven-time Canadian champion, who received Swimming Canada's prestigious Victor Davis Award in 2003 and hopes to qualify for her first Olympics in 2012. "I can't tell you how proud and excited I am to have been chosen to represent Canadian student-athletes at the opening ceremonies. I'm especially proud to represent my teammates from the swim team, many of whom I've known and have travelled with around the world for a number of years."

"MacKenzie is very deserving of this honour. She has been an exceptional student-athlete for many years and this is a great way to conclude her university career," said Baxter. "We are proud of her and we know she will represent us well tomorrow."

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