

Pooling her ideas: Jackson was inspired by the achievements of her sister, Nicola, to secure a bronze medal at the 2008 Games in Beijing and she now has her sights set on a successful London 2012

# Jackson spurred by family rivalries in pursuit of success

A desire to better her sister has brought an Olympic medal and the prospect of more, Alyson Rudd writes

pics in Beijing and who is on course to secure a medal again next year. Rather cruelly, not only her coaches told her that she paled in comparison with Nicola, her sister and the winner of two world championships in relay events, but the parents of other hopefuls.

"It was because my sister was so amazingly talented, could swim and be so good at it," Jackson said. "My stroke wasn't that great and I was told that, as I wasn't a natural swimmer, I just wouldn't make it."

"Some people can get in the pool and their stroke is perfect from a young age. They don't have to work on it. That was my sister. She would look perfect, nice and graceful, and everyone would say, 'Oh look at her stroke, she looks so good in the water', then I'd get in and I didn't look graceful and made everything look hard work."

"Coaches said my stroke wasn't right and I had to change everything. Even now I don't have the perfect stroke. We

work on technique and I have to change things."

Yes, those same critics do hold their hands up and tell Jackson that she has proved them wrong, but it is impressive that she kept on swimming despite the flak.

"When people tell you you're not going to make it, you think, 'Well, I'm going to prove you wrong,'" Jackson said. "I enjoyed it so much, I felt at home in the water and I wanted to be better than my sister."

Nicola, who is two years older, retired from the sport before they had the chance to compete together in the relay but Nicola's daughter, Lily, 6, is a keen swimmer and asks her aunt for tips.

Jackson has arrived from a meeting with a solicitor. She and Grant Turner, her boyfriend and also a freestyle swimmer, are buying a house together. "This is probably more stressful for me because I don't have a clue what

happens when you're buying a house," she said. "At least with swimming it's an everyday thing. It's not stressful; it's a hobby that's turned into our job."

Jackson finds the Olympic trials, which run from March 3-10, more stressful than the actual event. "We're all a bit tense," she said. "Once we've qualified we can get excited."

Part of the reason for this is that London will be Jackson's third Olympics. The 2004 Games in Athens were a calamity, the 2008 Olympics were surprisingly successful and so 2012 ought to be a relative breeze.

"It didn't go that well for me in 2004," she said. "I was only 17 and shocked to make the team. I was a kid in a sweetshop. I didn't swim very well. I was overexcited. There were 7ft tall athletes in the dining hall and famous people—I couldn't believe I was in the same room as them."

"But in 2008 I just got on with it. I was relaxed and I knew in the second week I could watch other sports. What I'll take into 2012 is to stay calm and relaxed."

She also sees success in London as a means of thanking the public for their support. "Hopefully, things will go well for Team GB next year, so we can thank the public for doing the Lottery," she said.

Her bronze in the 400 metres freestyle was overlooked, to an extent, because Rebecca Adlington won the gold. There is no residual resentment that her own fanfare was more subdued.

"I'm not that type of person," she said. "I'm not in it for the limelight. I think people from the outside world wonder how we can all get on if we are

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competing with each other, but away from the pool we can be friends."

She has a close bond with the girls she trains with at Loughborough University. At the weekend, after a Saturday morning of training, "we get so excited we get to straighten our hair and put make-up on and you do your nails — though it comes off in the water the same day because of the chlorine. We are quite girly."

Tomorrow she will watch England play Spain in the friendly football international at Wembley. She likes rugby and football, but only when England are playing.

Jackson says that she possesses an extra degree of patriotism because she is a member of Team GB. And that probably explains why she predicts England will beat Spain 3-2.

● Jo Jackson is supporting the Be There with Team 2012 appeal, which is raising funds for the 1,200 athletes in Team 2012, presented by Visa. To donate and win tickets to London 2012, go to [team-2012.com](http://team-2012.com) or enter our competition on the facing page.

+ That is the same Jo Jackson who won a bronze medal in the 2008 Olym-

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