

Written by John Crumlish

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As veteran Austrian gymnast **Elisa Haemmerle** prepares for this month's World Championships in Doha, Qatar, she continues her renewed push towards a berth to the Olympic Games after two tries.

Hämmerle is hopeful that Doha will shift her and her Austrian team one competition closer to qualifying for the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo. She and teammate **Barbara Gasser** contended for Austria's one individual spot for the 2012 London Games, which Gasser ultimately earned. In podium training at the Olympic test event in Rio in April 2016, a competition that served as the final qualifying meet for the 2016 Rio Games, Haemmerle ruptured her Achilles tendon.

Recent results indicate that the 22-year-old Haemmerle is on course for 2020. She was Austria's top scorer on balance beam and uneven bars at the European Championships in Glasgow in August. She won the fourth Challenge Cup medal of her career at last month's Challenge Cup of Szombathely, where she earned the bronze medal on balance beam and placed fourth on uneven bars. Last weekend she placed 10th on balance beam (0.10 shy of the final) and 15th on uneven bars in qualifications at the French International in Paris.

Haemmerle plans to compete on the same two apparatuses in Doha, where she wants to help her Austrian team advance in the qualification process for the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo. Also slated for Austria in Doha are **Bianca Frysak**, **Jasmin Mader**, **Marlies Maennersdorfer**, **Christina Meixner** and **Alissa Moerz**.

IG Online touched base with the resolute Haemmerle for this update on her goals for Doha and beyond.

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**IG:** What motivated you to return to gymnastics at the top level after your injury at the Rio test event?

**EH:** I never wanted an injury to be the reason to retire from gymnastics. When the time comes to quit, I want it to be my own decision. I don't want the last thing that I did in gymnastics to be that I injured myself. In 2016 I was in really good shape. My goal would have been to rank near the top 24 in the all-around. At that time, I was physically and mentally at the peak of my career, I was really well prepared and I had regularly obtained good results internationally prior to 2016. I knew I was capable of placing in the first third at the Rio Olympics, but I never got the chance to show everyone. This is especially what motivated me to come back. I felt like I had unfinished business to do, especially concerning Olympic Games. I have missed qualifying to compete at Olympics twice, and in the future, I don't want to blame myself for not trying one more time. I know that all of my training was not for nothing and will be worth it one day.

**IG:** As one of your last big tests before Doha, how did your performances in Szombathely compare to the progress you hoped to make at this point prior to the World Championships?

**EH:** I draw a very positive balance overall from Szombathely. In the qualifications as well as in the final I could show my routines on bars and beam without major mistakes. These results show me that I'm on the right track with my work. Generally, to feel really prepared for a competition, I need many repetitions. Unfortunately, due to some shoulder issues after the European Championships, I was not able to train full bars routines until last week. I guess the many years of competition experience and mental strength helped me to hit my routines.

**IG:** Between now and Doha, what will be the focus of your training?

**EH:** For Doha it is planned that I will compete on bars and beam, like I did in Glasgow. We will focus on details in order to increase the Execution score. Furthermore I will especially pay attention on connecting elements in my beam routine, by which I could improve the D-score by 0.5 tenths.

**IG:** Doha is an important step for you and your team in the process of qualifying for Tokyo.

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What hopes and expectations do you have, for yourself personally and for your team, in Doha?

**EH:** Unfortunately, our team has been weakened due to our two strongest all-around teammates, Jasmin Mader and Marlies Maennersdorfer, suffering from injuries. This is going to make our initial goal, to reach the top 24, really difficult. We wanted to reach this goal to be able to send a team to next year's World Championships (in Stuttgart). For me personally, I want to concentrate to perform well on bars and beam, and be able to perform according to my training achievements. In this way I can strengthen my self-confidence and help our team to score a better result. Until then, I hope our team will be able to prepare well for Doha and I hope we will suffer no more injuries.

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