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Mississauga native Silken Laumann posed for this photo shortly before the tragic accident in May which threatened to take her out of the Summer Olympics. The gutsy athlete defied the odds by not only competing, but by qualifying for the single sculls final which went early this morning.

BARCELONA, Spain — The only thing soaring higher than the 40 degree temperatures are the hopes of Canadians that Mississauga's Silken Laumann will have somehow found the strength and determination to capture Olympic gold in this morning's single sculls finals. The race went off at about 3:10 a.m. local time.

Laumann qualified for the final Friday morning when she won her semi-final heat.

Unlike her opening race where she took a strong lead before relenting over the final 1,000 metres, Laumann took a different approach.

"It was a very good race," said Laumann at the ensuing media conference. "I went off more conservatively and put a lot more effort into the middle 1,000. I focused hard on putting up a tempo that would be hard for the rest to keep up with and I wanted to stay in contact with the leaders. I think I caught the field by surprise and I think they were waiting for me to die."

"I know I'm capable of even more because I didn't push myself right to the line," added the 27 year old. "I still had some reserve left and that was a good confidence builder. I think they'll take me as a serious contender now so I won't be able to take anyone by surprise. I don't have that advantage now."

The defending world champion shocked the rowing community when she deemed herself healthy enough to compete, only 2½-months after Laumann was accidentally rammed by a German men's pairs boat at a meet in Essen, Germany and suffered a broken leg, severed calf muscle and nerve damage that required three operations and a skin graft.

Due to the mishap, Laumann is still playing down her chances of a gold.

"I'm not looking for my best result," she said. "I'd be pretty tickled with a medal."

"Everyone will be going for broke the whole way, but for me to win a medal — I'll have to have a perfect race. I don't

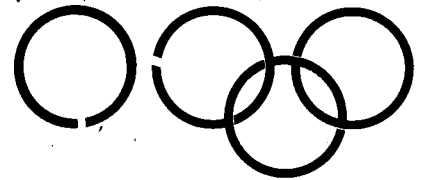
thing anyone was happy to see me hurt, but now they'll know I'm a force to be reckoned with. I think everyone out there is capable of a little more."

While Laumann admits to not being 100 per cent physically, the 5-foot-11 155-pound rock of muscle feels she's improved in other ways.

"Facing an event like this is difficult because everyone is at their very best. My preparation hasn't been ideal — to say the least. It's really been a mental battle to feel confident again. Sport is at least 50 per cent mental and if I've lost some of my physical strength, I think I've gained it in mental strength."

"There's been a lot of highs and lows but the hardest thing to do has been to regain my confidence and to think of myself as competitive," she added. "The Olympics have been a great motivator and keeping this goal in mind has given me something to work for every day. I came here to compete but I didn't know what my ability was. It took the first two races to determine that," she added with a golden smile.

G-DAY FOR SILKEN



The Summer Olympics' most dramatic story reaches its climax as Silken Laumann rows for the gold

Laumann, Silken

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