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Water Polo captain Pascale Casey to lead Uniroos in Taipei

Macquarie University student and 2015 Summer Universiade water polo gold medallist Pascale Casey will lead the 184-strong Australian Uniroos team into the opening ceremony in Taipei on Saturday, after being announced as Australian team flagbearer.

The 22-year-old psychology and human science student, who will captain the water polo team in Taipei, was a key member of the Uniroos team that won the gold medal two years ago in Gwangju, Korea, following a dramatic penalty shootout win over Canada.

A "shocked" Casey said she was very honoured to lead the largest ever Australian team at the Summer Universiade (also known as the World University Games).

"The opening ceremony is amazing, every time even thinking about it I get goose bumps because it's an experience that is hard to beat," Casey said.

Competing in her third Universiade, she will also be at her third opening ceremony.

"My first one in Russia was the most memorable, it was an amazing experience," Casey added.



She becomes the fourth consecutive female athlete to carry the flag at the Summer opening ceremony, following Olympic gold medallist Catherine Skinner (shooting) in 2015, Marianna Tolo (basketball) in Kazan, Russia in 2013 and swimming star Alice Mills in Shenzhen, China in 2011.

Casey is the first female water polo player to receive the honour, and hopes to follow in the footsteps of men's water polo team captain Robert Maitland, who carried the flag into the 2009 opening ceremony in Belgrade, Serbia, before going on to win the gold medal with the team.

Casey is one of three members of the gold medal winning 2015 team returning with the aim of defending their title. She joins Tyler Baillie (Queensland University of Technology) and Julia Barton (University of Newcastle) who are hungry for more success as well as notable inclusions including Mollie Williams, a freshman at Indiana University, who recently became the Hoosiers 10th all-time player and second freshman in program history to collect All-American honours.

The 2015 side went through the tournament undefeated, but thinking about winning the gold medal again isn't top of mind just yet for the 2017 Unirooms side.

"It's definitely a team that hasn't played much together before so the past three weeks we've been working on getting to know each other and predicting what each other will do so I think by the first whistle on the first games we'll be ready to go."

"We are a pretty young team but we are working on our game, not worrying about who the opposition is, who they have in the team, just playing our game and hopefully the results will speak for themselves."

Australia opens its tournament on the morning of the opening ceremony, with its first encounter against Greece, making for a long day with the ceremony later that night.

"It will be a big day," Casey said, "but we don't play again until late on Sunday so we can have a sleep in."



Competition commences Friday, ahead of Saturday night's opening ceremony, with the men's water polo team taking on Argentina on Friday, the men's artistic gymnastics team in action on Saturday morning while the women's water polo team take on Greece.

Sunday features the first day of full competition, with Unirooms in action in the men's gymnastics, swimming, diving, fencing, judo, taekwondo, while the Emerging Boomers play Ukraine in basketball, the men's volleyball team takes on the Czech Republic and both the women's and men's water polo teams play Italy.

Across 16 different sports, the 2017 Unirooms team includes Commonwealth Games swimming gold medallists Leiston Pickett (Griffith University) and Ben Treffers (Australian National University), Olympians Michelle Jenneke (The University of Sydney - 100m hurdles), Brittany O'Brien (Western Sydney University - diving), Heming Hu (Monash University - table tennis), as well as two-time Universiade bronze medallist Kiah Melverton (Griffith University - swimming).

The Uniroos finished the 2015 edition in Korea with a record 19 medals to finish 15th on the medal tally with four gold, three silver and twelve bronze, the best result from an Australian team in 23 editions of the Summer Universiade.

The Summer Universiade is the world's second largest international athletic event, double the size of the Winter Olympics and bigger than the Commonwealth Games.

Featuring more than 7,500 athletes from 141 countries, the Summer Universiade is a crucial stepping stone for emerging young stars striving for the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games or the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games.

Over the years international university sport has witnessed the emergence of a number of Australian world championship, Commonwealth Games and Olympic champions including Cate Campbell (swimming), Steve Hooker (athletics), Brooke Hanson (swimming), Steve Moneghetti (athletics), Ralph Doubell (athletics), Jon Sieben (swimming) and Michelle Timms (basketball).

To be eligible to participate in the Universiade, athletes should be undergraduate or graduate students between the ages of 17 and 28 (Basketball is under 24) or have graduated in the year immediately preceding the year of the event.

Eurosport will broadcast highlights of the Games in Australia, but to best keep up with the action follow the Australian Uniroos on the web, Facebook and Twitter (@AUSuniroos).