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Australian swimmer Katja Dedekind is now a world record holder and Commonwealth Games gold medallist, but the 21-year-old is in no rush to race through what she hopes is a long career.

Aided by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), Katja, who is blind in the right eye and has limited vision in the left due to congenital cataracts and amblyopia, is continuing to build the right supports for more success in and out of the pool.

Katja said using her NDIS funding to access the right supports helped her training and performance leading into Birmingham, after a move to Brisbane from the Sunshine Coast prior to the Commonwealth Games.
“It’s no secret the NDIS has been a big help,” Katja said.

“I can’t drive, so I have a good network of support workers to take me to and from training and drive me around.

“Just having those support workers through the NDIS has been life changing and a world of help for me.”

Originally from Durban in South Africa, Katja and her family relocated to Melbourne when she was 7, before making their way to sunny Queensland.

Swimming from an early age, Katja took up the sport competitively in 2012. Attending trials for the 2016 Rio Paralympics for the experience, Katja made the team, before winning a bronze medal at the Games in the 100m backstroke S13.

After winning 2 more bronze medals at Tokyo 2020, Katja won 2 silvers at this year’s World Championships in Portugal, plus her first gold in the 50m freestyle S13.

Claiming a new women’s 50m freestyle S13 world mark and gold medal after stopping the clock at 26.56 at the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, Katja said the feeling of finding out on live television in an interview with swimming legend, Cate Campbell, was surreal.

“I wasn’t sure if I’d won gold… I was not even sure where I’d touched in place or time,” Katja said.

“I’m not sure if the other girls knew, they were just like, ‘good job, good swim’.

“After finishing a race, officials will come to you to tell you to be at medal ceremony at certain time, but they didn’t tell me this time.

“Cate had spoken to me earlier in the week about the race, and during the moment, she surprised me with the news.

“I was shaking for so long after the swim, and I just kind of lived in the moment.”

Katja recently celebrated her 21st birthday and is now settled in Brisbane.

Looking forward to becoming a ‘social butterfly’, Katja is continuing to build her capacity for the future.

Katja plans on using her NDIS supports to grow her independence and navigate the city, work, and whatever her future holds outside of the pool.

“My life out of pool keeps me busy and I’m working towards finding that person and athlete balance,” Katja said.

“I try to go shopping and do random stuff, and I work 2-3 times a week at the Dunlop Park Swimming Pool in Oxley. They’ve been great with helping me with vision and accessibility.

“I’ve also been doing stuff with Vision Australia in mobility and accessibility in the home, and previously (on the Sunshine Coast) I was independent and living alone as everything was 5 kilometres away.

“Now, my gym is in one direction, work is in another, so, I have a lady coming to show me the bus routes in Brisbane so I can use them as well.

“The NDIS has funded all of that.”

After conquering the Commonwealth, Katja won’t put a cap on what she can achieve. With the potential for a shot at Paralympics’ gold on home soil, Katja is looking towards long-term success.

“After the world record, I’m the hunted, not the hunter, so, I won’t sit back and relax and will keep working hard,” Katja said.

“I’ve spoken to people who’ve swum at the Paralympics at home, and there’s the Paralympics in Brisbane in 2032. I’ll be only 31, so, I’d love to swim all the way to a 5th Games at home.”

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