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### “What Swimming in the NHSA Has Meant to Me”

I remember the feeling of excitement I had when I witnessed a swim practice for the very first time during my swim lessons. At the time I was only six, but I was fascinated by not only how fast the swimmers were, but also by how much they seemed to love what they were doing. They were laughing and yelling for a relay race, and I was quickly won over. When I was invited by my future swim coach to join the team, I quickly made the best decision of my life. I was completely unaware of what I had gotten myself into, and I quickly found myself being part of a group of people that would never let me down.

Many people say swimming is an individual sport, but I cannot disagree more. Ever since I started there has always been an amazing group of people supporting me, pushing me, and making me the person I am today. Growing up there have always been older teammates that have guided me in the right direction. I have always had what must be the closest feeling to having older brothers and sisters. These older siblings of mine helped me achieve more than I thought was imaginable, and they supported me through the good times and the bad. I get chills when I think back to my first junior nationals, when many of my current and former teammates all took the time to watch my race live over a podcast. They all knew how important it was to me, and they would not let their physical absence stop them from supporting me. They simply could not let me down.

Now that the roles are reversed and I am the oldest, I can only try and match the same things my older teammates did for me to teammates. I have learned to be a team player and to be supportive and inspired by others regardless of speed. Not only do I try to encourage others, I try to help them the same way my older counterparts did for me in the hopes that this trend will continue. Just like any other team there are many roles to fill, and together we do a pretty good

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job. This year have I have realized how special a swim team really is. I have always loved my team more than anything in the sport.

The most important teamwork in swimming actually happens between the coach and the swimmer, not your peers. Together my coach and I have gone through a roller coaster ride of ups and downs. We have celebrated victories, cried in defeats, but we have always learned and tried to improve. I will never forget when I won my first NHSA states, and he ran over to my lane and gave me a hug when I got out, or when he comforted me when I got disqualified in my signature event at age groups when I was fourteen. He has always done everything in his power to make me the best I could be, which even includes writing me cards in the mail pretending to be Ryan Lochte or Abby Lee Miller. The coach and the swimmer are a single unit, and it is very hard to perform well without the two working together. Without my coach I would not be the same person or athlete I am today.

As swimmers, the most important things we take away from the sport are not the amount of rubber ducks or ribbons we have hoarded somewhere in our rooms, but rather the intangibles. We have the opportunity to forge powerful friendships, and become a family as a team through the good and bad. We celebrate and we sulk, but we never have to do anything alone. The team in swimming is the most important part in the sport, and the friendships I have made with my teammates are the things I value most. It is never just me and the pool during a race, and I will never forget that it is not just my own efforts but my teammates and coaches as well. The NHSA has given me many lifelong memories and a team that I will not forget.

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