

TESS WHITE, ESC: What Swimming in the NHSA Has Meant to Me

Am I fast enough? Do I deserve this? These were the doubts that crept into my head as I got ready to lead off my team's A-200 free relay at NHSA states last year. I had been swimming with the three other girls on my relay for as long as I could remember. For one senior girl this was her final NHSA states. As I now approach my final NHSA states, I have been thinking a lot about all the memories of swimming I have and the lessons I have learned. I can honestly say that I would not be who I am today without what I have learned from swimming. Here are some of my most meaningful takeaways from swimming in the NHSA:

Trust your training. When I am nervous before a race, like I was before the 200 free relay, this is the thought I latch on to. My coach also tells it to us before big meets. We put in countless hours and yards in the pool every day, pushing ourselves as hard as we can. Even if you aren't feeling 100% the day of the race or maybe your warmup wasn't great, the work you have put in beforehand is still there and you still have an opportunity to swim great. You can also use this mentality at school. When I'm nervous before a big math test, I think back to all the time I spent in class and doing homework, practicing the topic I am being tested on. If there is a presentation coming up and I am worried about public speaking, I think of all the times I have had to give presentations before and how they have helped me get ready for this one. 'Trust your training' for a test or presentation in school will make you feel more prepared and confident, just as it does for swim.

Don't forget your suit. From someone who has forgotten their suit many times when they were younger, it is better for you, as well as for the stress of your coaches and parents, if you remember to always bring your suit to meets. This lesson is also applicable in life -- always remember the essentials.

Have patience. When you're younger it can be easy to go best times at every meet. When I was twelve, I had six age group cuts and was making finals in everything. Over the next few years, I hit a plateau and struggled to even come close to my best times. During that time I also had some issues with my back which kept me from training as hard as I knew I could. Though quitting crossed my mind more than I care to admit, talking with my coaches helped me learn about the importance of patience in swimming. As you get faster it becomes harder to go best times and reach your next goal. You need to have patience with yourself and continue training and you will get there. Rushing and going through the motions won't help -- it will actually hold you back. In life and in swimming, having patience and doing things correctly will get you where you want to go.

Pack food. If you know any swimmer then you know we are hungry people. After a long practice, having a granola bar on the car ride home can be lifesaving. My personal favorite is a combination of skittles and almonds with the ratio of one almond to every two skittles. This also makes for a great snack for during school.

Take things one step at a time. "Take this set one part at a time" is a common phrase I hear at swim practice. It is usually one of the most repeated phrases from my coach when we do long, complicated sets. It can be very discouraging when you think about how much yardage or racing you have ahead of you when you're already exhausted. The same thing can be said about life -- when it becomes crazy with homework, practices, meets, friends, family, and other commitments it becomes easier and less stressful when you think of things in smaller bits. Put all of your attention and focus on finishing one thing at a time and the work gets done faster, you usually get more out of it, and it becomes less scary and stressful.

Have fun. Let's face it, swimming can be an incredibly difficult and boring sport, even if it is the best sport in the world. Having fun and loving what you do makes it all worth it in the end.

Be a good teammate. My teammates and coaches are one of the main reasons why I swim. We push, encourage, and cheer for each other when we need it and make ourselves be the best we can be. At a meet, if one person can do an amazing swim it inspires the whole group to also swim their best. On Sunday of New England Seniors this year, the sessions had to be altered and there were a lot of scratches because the air quality was not great. Instead of being discouraged, my coaches, teammates, and I texted and talked to each other and pushed each other to swim well despite the negative thoughts flying around. In the end we had many best times and huge time drops on our team since we all were encouraging each other to be the best we can be. The hours of training, early

mornings, late nights, bleached hair, dry skin, hard sets, disappointments, and other struggles of swimming become worth it when you have a great community to push you. In school and work, surround yourself with great people who want you to succeed because it pushes you to try your hardest.

All of these lessons and memories help me and make me a better swimmer. Before that 200 free relay at NHSA states last year, I stood on the side of the pool surrounded by my teammates and cheered the little kids on during their relays. I saw other people that I have been racing against for years doing the same. The NHSA community has become very special to me -- the officials, coaches, and swimmers on other teams that I get to see time and time again are a constant in my life that I am going to miss so much next year. As I stood behind the blocks for the 200 free relay last year, surrounded by my teammates and fellow NHSA swimmers, my nerves faded away and I was ready to race.