

Madeline Hiller:

Being a part of a swim team, choosing to jump into a pool at 5:30 am, and spending entire weekends at swim meets is not only a lifestyle, but a privilege that is often taken for granted.

I am fortunate to say that my parents exposed me to swimming at a very young age. While most of my friends could ski by the time they were two, I could swim; but by “swim”, I mean eggbeater kick across the pool with my head barely breaking the surface. I spent my summers at the local pool, staying from opening to closing and never getting bored, so I decided to join the recreational swim team. A few years later, after observing my sister’s first year of club swimming and participating in a few trial practices, I stopped gymnastics and embarked on a journey that would impact my life forever.

Although many consider swimming to be an individual sport, it is really a team sport. Coming into swimming from gymnastics was refreshing, as both were individualized, but the swim team was much more welcoming and supportive. When I went to my first trial practice, the other swimmer immediately accepted me and made me feel right at home, asking me when I would be back and when I would finally join the team. Ultimately, although I loved the sport, I decided to become a year-round swimmer because of the people.

Swimming has led me to discover the importance of two of my now top values: selflessness, perseverance. When I was thirteen, I plateaued and had a rough season mentally. However, I realized just because I wasn’t meeting all of my goals that season, did not mean that I had the right to transfer negative energy to my teammates. I learned to put my hardships behind me and stay positive for my teammates who were meeting their goals and beyond. No matter how much I added, hurt, or doubted myself, I cheered, congratulated, and applauded those who excelled. Changing my mindset to be more team oriented positively impacted my own swimming, as I was able to feed off of the hype from the success of others.

That same season, my coach taught me to persevere. She told me to “trust the process”. I kept giving 100% in practice and at meets. My newfound selflessness also was able to help me persevere. The next year I flew out of the rut. I learned to trust the process and it paid off.

Swimming in the NHSA is particularly special because everyone knows everyone. I have been swimming in the NHSA for eight years now, and with those eight years have come friends from all over the state. We only have to race each other once to become friendly because we can all relate: we are all going through the same rewarding pain during practices and races; we’ve all had slumps and successes in our careers; and we all share the love of swimming. The first time I made a friend from another team, I was ten years old; I was so excited for all of the meets after, because I had one more person to share experiences with, cheer for, and race for. The network only expanded from there, and now I am a friend and supporter of many NHSA swimmers, and even some coaches.

Since we are all familiar in the NHSA, I exercise my support towards other teams as well. When a New Hampshire-based team or swimmer does exceptionally well

at a meet, I get excited for them, even if my race was off. When I do well, other swimmers and coaches from the NHSA have congratulated me. The camaraderie between teams in the NHSA is my favorite aspect of being a part of this league because it not only makes me more excited and enthusiastic about swimming, but also ignites a competitive fire inside of me. Naturally, I am not a very competitive person. However, racing the same swimmers weekend after weekend, year after year, and seeing them progress, makes me want to improve with them. The familiarity in the NHSA healthily drives my competitive edge, something that has not always been present, and I am grateful for that.

I am so glad I switched over to swimming those eight years ago because if I had not, I would be the person who I am today. Although swimming has brought its ups and downs, I have never stopped loving the sport or its people. The lessons I have learned over the course of my club-swimming career are as good as gold, and they will be carried with me for the rest of time.