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What Swimming in the NHSA has Meant to Me

My first swim meet as a competitive swimmer was the New Hampshire Swim Association's annual state meet in White River Junction, Vermont. I can vividly remember my anxiety of being a first time competitive swimmer. Having started at the late age of 13, I felt out of place, behind the curve in regards to the swimmers that surrounded me. I felt I was forcing myself into social dynamics that had no place for me. These swimmers had known each other for years. They had inside jokes, they were comfortable, and most of all, they were experienced. Man did they look confident. As a rookie who couldn't claim a single swim to their name, these kids seemed like Olympians; well-oiled machines built for the glory of competition. Swimming a relay with them may have been the most daunting task; I felt like an anchor, but in a more literal sense than swimming's adoption of the word.

Eventually my fears were overcome. I started off with the basics. With the courage I built up I blurted out a "Hey what's your name?" We began to talk. The Olympians would ask me, "Where did you move here from?" and I'd answer "Puerto Rico". They loved that one. It may actually have been my first break into the friend group. I was dubbed "Puerto-Rican Pete" for months. These friendships quickly evolved, becoming the ties that would carry me through the last 5 years I've spent swimming. These friendships have enriched my life in ways I can't manage to put down in words. They've provided me with an environment of encouragement, commitment, and warmth in one of the most mentally challenging sports I've ever played, and so much more out of the water.

Once I had laid my foundations on my team, swimming at NHSA's meet became one of our more cheerful meets, a celebration of swimming, and an escape from its pressures. Rather than stressing about the reading of a stopwatch, we'd watch the seniors dress in leis, straw skirts and effervescent colored glasses. Now that I myself have reached the ever-so-elusive senior-year, I can't help but reflect on my career as a swimmer. I think about my first meet. I think about all my races over the years. I think about everything I've gained from this sport, and have nothing but gratitude for the lessons and intangibles it's taught me. Swimming in the NHSA has encapsulated this for me. It celebrates not only swimming, but sport as a whole. It celebrates the enrichment of its competitors and the relationships that sport fosters.