

My love affair with sports began at birth in a hospital 3.2 miles away from The Ohio State University football stadium. I grew up pretending the TV could hear me as I rattled on about the blown calls, perfectly in tune with the rest of my family. While most girls my age enjoy surfing *tumblr*, I would rather be scouring *SportsCenter* any day. For years, I used my *SportsCenter* knowledge to command a managerial position on my dad's fantasy football team, methodically researching which players to draft and setting line-ups. Although I cannot boast any results to bolster my fantasy league reputation, I nonetheless became unconditionally and irrevocably in love with everything sports related.

These days, my love of sports extends far beyond the couch. The summer before my freshman year of high school, a joint swim team between two of the local high schools came to fruition. I had always been a Glen Ellyn Gator, swimming during the summer, but had yet to venture into competitive swimming.

Tryouts were my first shock into how difficult it was going to be swimming at a high school level. After three days of grueling tryouts, the pool-less assortment of twenty girls that would comprise our varsity team was determined, to be coached by an ex-Navy SEAL trainer who fails to understand the concept of sleep. The first season was supposed to be a trial run, to see if the program could succeed under the unfavorable conditions, yet we thrived, sending six girls to state.

While swimming itself drew me in, it was my team which kept me coming back. The twenty of us formed an incredibly close bond and the coach, quite simply, is the best coach I've ever had. He pushed me past what I had perceived as my "limits" not only through twenty-five or so hours of practice a week, but by holding us all accountable for our work ethic, reminding us that pain is only temporary. After a while, the soreness went away and we were able to achieve great things as a team. We were each other's support system, the one constant from season to season, the one thing that kept us sane as we traveled from morning practice to school, then right back to afternoon practice.

Swimming gave me such an incredible sense of belonging, all the while forcing me to reach within myself and embrace the potential that deep down I knew was there. Between the chlorine, the camaraderie, the competition, the crazy schedules, and the coach, I found a home. Through this experience, I have learned to trust myself and be confident in my abilities, whether in the pool, in the classroom, or in life.