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It's finally here...my senior year. I can remember the days when I thought 2003 would never come and I'd never be able to be the one deciding our team's outfits or actually doing the yelling rather than being yelled at. But, as everything does, the year has come and I am sitting here, typing, as I look out at the competition pool on the last opening ceremonies I will be a part of in Ft. Lauderdale, FL. I know I'll never forget my first Opening ceremonies, when I watched as a wide-eyed sophomore, completely dumbfounded by the incredible event occurring before my eyes. Nor will I ever forget the ceremonies last year, when I watched as my team strutted their stuff, being my first year to make it back to finals. But I know that this year's will top them all. As one of my teammates verbalized just last night, "Now we can't say the famous words, 'I can't wait to do this again next year.'" And she was so right.

This meet truly is an unbelievable experience. Every year since 2001, I've returned to this pool and every year, I've been amazed by the intensity and (at the same time) excitement that this pool and atmosphere provide. Unlike many of the other meets I participate in back home, this meet really makes me feel like someone special. Someone who's dedication to the sport has paid off in a way unimaginable and indescribable to all those who have yet to experience it. I have so often heard from graduating seniors that no other meet ever compares to this one. It has taken three years for me to fully understand the truth in those words.

I watch now as my team passes by in their red halter dresses and polo shirts, representing the YMCA characteristic of caring, I realize how lucky I am. I've grown up into the person I am because of these kids, stayed in the sport for them, and watched them grow up along with me. They've always done nothing but support me, whether it was while I was swimming in finals last year or when I failed to make finals in the same event this year. They have always loved me for who I am and I know I wouldn't be here without their encouragement. My victories would never have been as sweet and I may not have made it through my defeats. They are an amazing team that I am consistently proud to represent and be a part of.

So as the ceremonies conclude, and the time before the finals' start grows shorter, my heart begins to race and the butterflies in my stomach fully escape their cocoon. The 500's begin and it hits me: it's my final first night, my final 200 Medley Relay swim. And although I know I'll be upset when the night is over, right now the adrenaline couldn't be any better. Who knows what the night will hold in store for all the swimmers here...