

Thursday April 7, 2005

Hey Little Chiefers

Sometimes it is hard to find success in swimming, especially when you have a not so hot race (races are never bad, they are just not what you want). It's hard to be happy when you come to the biggest meet of your club-swimming career and add 8 seconds to your seedtime. It's hard to know that you were seeded in the top 8 and end up 25th. It's hard to touch the wall and see a time you know you would be happy with at practice, but since you are at Nationals it's a bit disappointing. It's hard to think back to all the practices you went to and all the sets you did to prepare for this race. It's hard to look back and realize that you swam this race faster at the home meet, unshaved, in the middle of the season, after the 500 free, in the pool you swim in every day; it's hard to know you have done the same thing for the past 5 years.

For 6 years I have been swimming the 400 IM at Nationals and for 5 years I have been trying (apparently unsuccessfully) to break the 400 IM curse. For whatever reason, I cannot seem to do the 400 IM at nationals. I don't know if I get nervous or scared or if I choke or what happens...it just doesn't ever come together at nationals.

I really believed that this year, senior year would be different; I thought I would figure it out, solve the mystery, beat the 400 IM. I was wrong, but even so, the race wasn't all that bad. If I had not swum the 400 IM today, I would be accepting defeat: I would be giving up. There is always hope. And when someday finally I can swim the 400 IM at a meet like nationals - a big meet in college... because I have no more nationals - and I succeed and can beat the race, it will feel much better because it is never over until you give up.

I learned a lot from the freshman on the team today. They all tapered for others meets so that they could make their national cuts in the 400 IM. When they swum today, they did not

achieve their best times and were upset, even crying after their race because they thought they would have best times their first year at nationals. I had to explain how overwhelming it was to be here for the first time and to come that close to a best time after holding on to a taper. It was amazing. Then I swam... Needless to say I was upset and fighting back tears in the locker room when I saw one of the freshman IMers I had talked to earlier. She told me she really looked up to me and wished she could swim like me. That really meant a lot.

So, for me, the day wasn't a waste; I made a positive impression on a younger swimmer, which I thought was, and is, extremely important. I was this morning's devotion leader. I finished the 400 IM and made the qualifying time (something I can't say about every nationals). And I have a goal: a promise to my self that someday somewhere I will be able to swim the 400 IM at a big meet under pressure. Someday I will look back on today and all of the Day 3's that I swam the 400 IM at nationals and I will know that finally learned how to beat this race. I can't wait for that day.

Chiefs on the Warpath!

Your swimming friend

Elena Luisa Ramirez

Champaign County Aqua Chiefs (Illinois)