

Friday April 8, 2005

Hey Little Chiefers!

Today I swam my last event at my last YMCA Nationals. Part of me is very excited about completing my swimming this stage in my swimming career. Now I will move onto college swimming at Saint Louis University where I will be on a team competing for the pride and recognition of our school's swimming program. Swimming in college is something I have dreamed about since I got my first college letter in 8th grade as a result of YMCA National competition. It will be an exciting new chapter in my swimming that I'm sure will bring be many new friends, opportunities, experiences, and hopefully successes.

The other part of me is very sad today. I have competed in 6 YMCA National Meets and have swum over 60 races (prelims, finals, time trials, and relays). I will greatly miss this meet next year. What I will miss is not the races won or lost or the best times achieved or missed. I will miss the friends and experiences from Nationals, but I will never forget them. I will remember the impact that this meet has had on me not only as an athlete but as a young adult and I will remember what my participation in the meet has meant to me. I wish I would be able to come back next year to the Hall of Fame Pool and swim in YMCA Nationals, to go shopping in the Vendor Village, take a team picture on the swimmer statue, eat Dough Boys for dinner after finals, get a tan from the ID band, listen to the announcer read bios, watch the Gate Guys dance around. It is all the little things that I have come to love and look forward to that I will miss the most and I will hold them close to me for years to come.

2005 Champaign County Aqua Chief National Team:

Thank you for your support throughout the journey to Nationals. I can honestly say that this has been the closest group of swimmers that I have been able to attend Nationals with. When the going got tough, we got tougher. We dug down deeper and I am truly impressed with how everyone came together to make it happen for the team. Thank you for staying positive, cheering, and going above and beyond what was expected of you.

2005 Illinois National Teams and Coaches:

Even though we are all from different teams throughout the state and compete against each other during the course of the year, it never ceases to amaze me that we can come together as a whole at Nationals by cheering, encouraging, and consoling. I believe that this is what swimming is all about: Being able to be competitive with each other in

the water but still have a solid friendship both on and off the deck.
Thank you and Good Luck in the future!

Coach Ed:

Thank you for getting up early every morning to save our team a spot on the bleachers. We really appreciate it. I don't know how you do it every morning and still manage to have a smile on your face and surround us with a positive atmosphere.

Coach Gary:

Although at times it was not always apparent, I have enjoyed swimming for you these past three years. We have been through ups and downs, good swims and bad swims, but we've always managed to learn something from them. I have learned a lot from you about swimming smarter, goal setting, technique, and training. Thank you for everything that you have done for me and the team.

Mom and Dad:

This is it. No more Nationals. No more "The Swings" (Oasis). No more early mornings waiting in line to save a seat for the parents. No more short course Aqua Chief swim meets. No more Gate Guys. No more Vendor Village. No more St. Barts before prelims. No more orange and blue. Thank you for all the opportunities you have given me to succeed and move ahead in swimming. Thank you for always supporting me and believing in me even when no one else did. Thank you for everything.

This is the end of my athlete journal. It has been a wonderful meet, as always. I hope that all swimmers back home and across the country reading my journal have had an insight to what it means to compete at Nationals, and I hope that someday all of you will have this opportunity. I hope that you can love this sport not because you swim fast and you win, but because it is something that you truly love doing.

I will never swim at another YMCA National Meet, but someday, I will be back. Maybe I will be a mom in the stands, maybe I will be a coach on deck, or maybe I will be a YMCA National Volunteer, but someday I will be back.

Chiefs on the Warpath!

Your Swimming Friend

Elena Luisa Ramirez

Champaign County Aqua Chiefs (Illinois)