

Friday Finals Devotion

Gabrielle Giambagno, Hamilton YMCA New Jersey

Team

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a team is described as a number of persons associated together in work or activity.

I, however, disagree. In the experience, a team has proven to be something more. Is it enough to only describe a group of people who are together more than 20 hours a week, travel throughout the country and experience excitement, frustration, anger and sadness with one another as merely “a number of persons associated together?”

To me, that sounds more like a family.

I have been swimming for about nine years. Swimmers have joined and left my team. Races have been won and lost. Seasons have come and gone. But the one thing that has stayed constant throughout the years is the family that my team has formed.

In a family there is typically a parent figure. I am lucky to have three: coaches Sue, Richard and Uncle Doug. These three incredible individuals have truly become parent-figures in my life and the lives of my teammates. They clean up after us, they drive us to swim meets, and they tell us what to do, when to do it and how to do it. Seriously, our coaches, or “parent”, really do put as much devotion and heart into this sport as we do. The number of hours they devote to help us achieve our dreams is unbelievable. They go out of their way to spend most of their free time with us. And during this time, they help each of us individually by motivating us and giving advice. We easily feel their care, guidance, inspiration and love at every practice and every meet. Though, at the same time, like real parents, we do find ourselves butting heads.

We argue over silly things like lane designation, the difficulty of main sets, the events we are forced to swim. Yet, in the end we know that our “parents” are always right. They want nothing but the best for us. They love to see us succeed and grow as swimmers and as individuals.

In addition to parents, families often consist of siblings. My teammates and I repeatedly joke that we are related somehow. There are 12 of us attending Y Nationals, 12 members of a large group I call more than just friends, but family. We spend all of our time together: evenings and weekends are spent training and competing; Saturday nights are spent at the movies or dinner; memorials and funerals are attended for teammates’ family and even our own friends. Most teammates, and siblings, cannot stand to spend more than the required hours with each other, but my teammates and I go out of our way to spend as much time as possible in one another’s company.

It scares me to think about next year: College. Who will I be without my family? They have helped form the person I am today whether they have realized it or not. Without swimming, without them, my friends would be obviously different, my hobbies would be different, my weekends would be spent differently, and I would be different. At the same time, though, we have grown so close that we will go out of our way to spend time together. The teammates that have left for college come back to visit constantly. We still go out to dinner. We still stay in touch. The relationships that we have built will continue throughout life. There is no way that I will ever forget about our friendships. I will never forget the moments that we have shared.

For me, a team is more than just a “group of persons associated together in work or activity” forms.

At early morning and late night practices, my team motivates and pushes each other.

At meets my team cheers each other and celebrates both victory and defeat.

At YMCA nationals, my family stands right behind me just as I know they always will.

In memory of Jeff Lowe, please hold hands and bow your heads.

Dear Lord,

We thank you for our friends, family, teammates, coaches and loved ones. We thank you for the relationships that transcend the meaning of friendship and are transformed into the meaning of family. We ask that you bless all of our extended families in the remainder of their experiences at YMCA Nationals. Amen