

Olympic Dreams by Elizabeth Beisel, North Kingstown High School Swim Team 2008

Swimming has been a part of my life since I was six months old, just like anybody else who did the “Learn to Swim program” at the YMCA. Most kids have moved on to play more popular sports such as soccer, basketball, football, and lacrosse. I am now fifteen years old and I’m still swimming in a pool everyday like it is my job. After joining a competitive swim team, nothing could get me away from the water, and I suppose that’s why I still have a strong passion for the sport today. These days, no one pays attention or even realizes what happens in the swimming world, as they are more focused on the Patriots, Red Sox, and Celtics. I must admit, swimming is not the most interesting sport to watch, but it is uplifting every once and a while to get recognition for something I put so much time into.

Once I started competing for my first swim team at five years old, Rams Swim Club out of Kingston, RI, I soon started breaking team and New England records. Not long after that, when I was ten, I made the decision to switch teams and swim for the Bluefish Swim Club of Attleboro, Massachusetts, a 45 minute drive there and back. I knew swimming was something I wanted to pursue, and making that sacrifice was one of the best decisions I have ever made. After making the move to Bluefish, I started to break several National Records and was soon moving up the ranks in national and international standings.

I have earned a few awards throughout my career, including MVP of the North Kingstown High swim team as a freshman, 2007 Rhode Island Female Athlete of the Year, and many more. Receiving these awards definitely makes the time and effort swimming requires worth it, and it is nice to be recognized for the accomplishments that I achieve.

Recently, at the 2008 winter RI High School State Swim Meet, I had one of the best meets I have had in a while. I swam the 200 free in state record time of 1:47.34, and also broke former Olympian Jenny Thompson’s pool record, which was amazing. In the 100 back, I broke another state and pool record with a time of 54.74. I’d have to say the 100 back swim was a surprise, since it was my best time by over a second. It was really good to finally swim fast and get a best time. The state meet on a whole was such a great experience. The two North Kingstown relay teams won also. The team of Gracie Bucci, Emma Jackson, Erin Anding, and I dueled it out with Prout in the 200 medley relay, and we came out on top. The last relay of the meet, Erin Anding, Emma Jackson, Lory Marsocci and I won the state title in the 400 free relay. Everyone at states stepped up and it was great to see such fast and elite swimming at a Rhode Island state championship.

Making the Olympics is almost every elite athletes dream. For swimming, you must qualify for the Olympic Trials by swimming faster than a certain time standard. Once you overcome that challenge, you can then compete in the events you qualified for. If you end up getting first or second in your event(s), then you have a free ticket to the Olympics. The Olympic Trials is the most stressful meet that one will experience. You’re Olympic berth is dependant on one race, and you only have one chance to make it. My main goal throughout my swimming career is to make the Olympics, and if I don’t, then life will just carry on. I am going into the Olympic Trials with the mindset of whatever happens, happens, and if I make it, great. If I don’t, I will have another shot in four years. I am still young, and as far as I am concerned I have nothing to lose compared to the twenty-five year old athletes who have only one more chance to make the team. Some people don’t realize how nerve-racking and difficult making the Olympic team is. They must understand that out of the most elite group of swimmers in the country, only 2 people make it in each event. It is a long shot for anybody, as there are at least 8 girls that are within 2 seconds of each other. It is anybody’s race, and every single swimmer is shooting for the same accomplishment of qualifying for the Olympic Games. Hopefully, when the trials come around, I will be ready for peak performance and represent Rhode Island as best as I can.

I have come to be known throughout Rhode Island as the ‘swimmer girl’, which is pretty cool. It also comes with a lot of pressure. So many people expect me to make the Olympics, and I feel that if I don’t, I am letting my friends and family down. Believe me, I have high expectations for myself and I am training harder than ever to qualify for Beijing, but if I don’t, I am still going to be the same teenage girl. To have people come up to you every day and ask you if you will be going to the Olympics is a shock. I have had some of my competitors ask me for my autograph, and that’s when I knew I had arrived at the elite swimming scene. To know that you have the potential to make something so prestigious is astounding, and I am grateful to have even made it this far.

Some people would never want to be a competitive swimmer because of the time and commitment you have to put into it. I practice three hours on weekdays, and four hours on the weekends. I train with mostly high school senior boys and Prout standout Laura Sogar, and typically practice can get intense. Racing is one of my favorite things about swimming, and getting through a hard race set can only make you that much better when it comes time to perform. Staying mentally tough through practices and meets is the key to being a successful athlete. Getting worked up over who you are racing against, or getting nervous about making a cut will just hurt your performance and set yourself up for failure.

Over the years, I have been able to travel across the world, to places like Australia, Scotland, Victoria, and to numerous states. Swimming has taught me about so many different cultures and lifestyles, and along the way I have met incredible Olympians and swimmers. As I progress through the sport, I hope I inspire kids to try out swimming and to make a difference in the swimming community. The friends and places I have been able to see have made all the time put into the sport worth it. I wouldn’t have it any other way.