

Hello everyone, I'm Caitlyn McHugh and I'm a senior on the National Team under Coach Ian and Coach Michael. This past year, I've had the honor of being a Team Captain alongside my teammate Sarah Nastasi. A year ago when we were given this job, we had no clue what we were in for. After endless meetings with each other, Coach Ian, and the other seniors, we decided that we wanted to change the atmosphere of our team at the pool. We needed a new way to be unified. In creating the motto, "success for one is success for all", we wanted to emphasize that each other's successes are just as great as our own. We don't stand alone, but as a unit and it is okay to lean on each other. Sarah and I had a proud parent moment at Premier a month ago. We had just finished our last race of the meet and the emotions were already flowing as it was our last short course race for Stingrays. We went and changed and right when we came out of the locker rooms we saw something so incredible. Our whole team, every swimmer from each pool of every age was on their feet cheering for our last Stingray in the water. As soon as he hit the wall, the team broke out into the new cheer Sarah and I had taught them at the beginning of the session, and even though we stood across the pool from them, we felt so connected to our team. We were so proud that this is what our team had become-one that was so obnoxiously cheering that the other parents in the stands would shush us as we were on our feet for every Stingray in the water. In that moment, we had really become a team, one that truly stood for success for one is success for all.

So, as I began writing this speech, I was thinking back through all the years in this sport and was like wow-there are a lot of defining moments and important memories that I have to sum up in a couple minutes. Similarly to a lot of you, I started swimming around the age of six or seven and since the beginning, I have loved it. My parents have never been the stereotypical crazy swimmer parents, not to say they're mellow by any means, but they never put any pressure on me. All that they required of me was to be involved in something. It could be swimming, soccer, student government, even chess club, it just had to be something that I enjoyed doing and could be a part of. Being an only child, my dad was all about getting me into a sport, so I did one of those camps where you try out a bunch of sports over a couple days-let's just say we found out that I wasn't coordinated nor agile very quickly...but when it came to swimming lessons, something clicked. Little did I know how important the sport would become to me. But, my dad, so excited that I started swimming, sat me down with my mom one day before my first meet. They said, okay, we are going to have to set some rules for this, and I was like okay. And so my dad said, I want you to remember these three rules: Rule number one, have fun. Rule number two, go fast. And Rule number three, if you forget the others, go back to number one. Also keep in mind I was six, so we couldn't go too complicated here. So, at the meet, before my first race I was so nervous for this 25, I walked over to my parents and they

said alright, remember rule number one? I said it's have fun! What's rule number two? Go fast! And Rule number three? If you forget the others, go back to number one! And my dad said that's right, now go out there and have fun with it and I attacked my first race with those words and big hug from my mom. Ever since then, even now, before my races my dad will ask me the rules, as he is almost always a timer behind the blocks with me. Even at Premier this past season, when I got nervous I would go and talk to my parents and my dad would say, remember the rules?, and my mom would tell me to just do my best and that's all they'd ask of me.

I've tried to keep that mentality as I've grown into the swimmer I am today. Before each race whenever I'd talk to coach, I'll always reply, "I'll do my best" to questions of winning or dropping time or how I'm going to do on this race. I try to judge my race on how well it went before I look at the time. When I hit the wall, was that everything I could put in that race, was that all I could give? Or was there more left in the tank? But if I could answer yes, that was everything I could give in that moment, then I can't be too hard on myself if I'm not happy with the time, because that was the best that I could be that day.

I could never stand alone in all of this. Something I absolutely love about Stingrays is how close we are as one big family. It's incredible how connected we are from the senior group all the way to the rookies. Every member on this team plays such an important part in this sport. When I moved here in fourth grade and joined Stingrays, I went to the Pentathlon where I met my big sister, Mackenzie Payment. Some of you may or may not remember her, but she is an incredible person I have always looked up to. Even though she is about six years older than me, she never made me feel the difference. I was so nervous at my first Stingray meet but she, along with her teammates had open arms and welcomed me. I knew that this was something good, I could belong here. I remember listening to her speech, as she stood up here several years ago as she shared her journey and talked about how she loved how connected she was with all of her teammates, not just the ones she trained with. Even though we never swam together, nine years later here I am graduating high school and she is already out of college, living near DC as a mechanical engineer and she's doing really well. The crazy thing is that we are still in contact, keeping up with each other. That's what I love about Stingrays along with the philosophy training for life; we build lifelong relationships that go way farther than the pool deck. We have all swam, cried, sweat, laughed, survived chlorine coughs and dry skin battles, have gotten up close and personal finding ways to fit ourselves into kneeskins, counted for each other, cheered, celebrated. We've shared accomplishments, and have picked each other up after failures, all of this we've been through together, and

we'll never forget it. I love knowing that as I go off to Nevada and my teammates head to California, Florida, Georgia and so many other places, that even though we are separated, we will always be able to come back to our home, our family, our team here. We are all a part of something special.

I can honestly say that I wouldn't be here without my coaches. In every step of my swimming career, I had an amazing coach supporting me. Our coaches teach us the true meaning of training for life. Not only by coaching us in the water, but by helping mold us into responsible student athletes, giving us endless opportunities to grow in character and as leaders. Starting off young, at the West Pool, Coach Andy began the whole process. All it takes is someone to believe in you. I remember him pulling me aside after practice one day to talk about the main set, 10x100s on the 1:20 and in a faster lane than I was used to. I was just barely making the intervals but I was too stubborn to give up. He had me sit next to him and he said, "You know Caitlyn, if you can hold 1:18s like that for a 500, you could drop so much time" and that was the first time a coach had ever talked swim strategy with me. You can call me weird, but I find it absolutely fascinating, the strategy behind the splits and how the small things added up over time can become the big things, I'm a distance swimmer, what can I say? Something I've always loved about our coaching staff, is that they care so much about the individual. Every swim is important, every athlete is important, every accomplishment whether it's swimming the 100 fly for the first time, getting your first qualifying cut or finally reaching your goal at your championship meet. It is all so important to them, and each one of our coaches puts so much effort into making that personal connection with every athlete. They don't just care about you as an athlete, but who you are as a person and how you are doing every day.

I have never been one to put winning first. I rarely know the time standards for cuts nor do I look at psych sheets before meets, I honestly just try to enjoy what I'm doing. Set your goals high, and aim for that state cut, that futures and juniors cut, but don't forget about the process it takes to get there. I've learned that winning is fun, but it is short lived. Enjoy the practices, enjoy your teammates, enjoy the sport we are so lucky to be a part of every day, because pretty soon it will be over. Again, it is crazy that I'm standing up here right now as a senior about to leave for college, to look down at my fellow senior teammates that I have known for years, and to see these wonderful people, about to go off and do such amazing things. Here our Stingray chapter is coming to an end and a new one is beginning. And for the rest of you, your Stingray chapter is continuing, and I know all of them will agree with me when I say enjoy every bit of it while you can. I wouldn't trade any of these memories or people for the world.

So, before I go, I just wanted to say thank you to our amazing coaching staff, especially Coach Ian, for everything you've done for me-for pushing me to the limit and for always believing in me and never giving up. I also want to say thank you to my parents, for not just believing in me, but always being there to support me and always being positive. I have used those three rules, not only in swimming but in other parts of my life too, and I will always carry what you've taught me with me for the rest of my life. Another thank you goes out to all of the volunteers, timers, and officials. We couldn't do any of this without you. Sarah, it has been an absolute pleasure getting to know you and getting the chance to work with you, I am so proud to call myself your teammate and I cannot wait to see all that you accomplish in the future. And finally, thank you to my fellow graduating seniors, my fellow animals (the distance swimmers), and the rest of my team. You guys are my family, and I will miss you so much. Thank you for always having my back and for giving me a home to come back to.