

## **ESSAY TOPIC:**

**Write a short essay on the following topic:**

***How has swimming contributed to who you are today?***

I've never been quite so tired. Although my body wants to give up, my mind and my heart refuse to give in. Just ten more seconds and I'll be done with this final butterfly lap.

Suddenly, I feel the soft touch of the finish pad, and the familiar satisfaction of finishing a race washes over me. Although it's hard to move and I creak and groan, I know I've done my best and left it all in the pool.

I thrive on physical activity. Depending on the season, a combination of running, biking, hiking, JV Soccer, gymnastics, hockey, and Varsity and Club swimming have consistently occupied about 20 hours each week throughout middle and high school. Competitive gymnastics was a big part of my life until, at only 13, repetitive stress injuries forced me to take 2 years off, and I came to love swimming as my primary sport.

My sophomore year, filling in on the gymnastics team as a favor to my coach, I broke my back in multiple places. Not only did it cross gymnastics off my list, I also could no longer compete with my swim team. Even playing my violin started to hurt, but I simply could not sit at home and do nothing for six months while my back healed. I continued to push myself to a point that it interfered with my healing and delayed my recovery. I discovered there were limits to what I could do, and was forced to accept I was not going to be able to compete at Regionals with my swim team.

Although I was disappointed, I didn't let that stop me. Instead of striving to improve my times and technique, I began swimming with a less experienced group to help my recovery, and set my sights on competing the next year.

I had grown up swimming with many of these kids, and the experience took my appreciation of Anchorage's close-knit swimming community to a new level. They completely supported me, even though I couldn't compete with them and help get points for the team. They didn't kick me to the curb or forget about me. Instead, they reminded me that this was just one season. It was only my sophomore year! I still had two more years to come back better than ever.

Although I wasn't fully healed (and likely never will be), I came back on the varsity team and served as Team Captain this year. Being Captain was definitely a learning experience for me, requiring that I strive to bring 60+ people together to create a team of individuals who trust and support one another. I am proud that I was able to bring everyone closer to create a cohesive, caring team. In addition, I was able to overcome all the obstacles I faced and achieve my best times in almost every single event I entered.

While my varsity swimming receives the most attention, being part of club swimming has been an essential part of my success as well. It not only assures that I have the opportunity for year-round training, but also allows me the chance to *compete* all throughout the year. This assures that I stay active and on-top of my training and have a bit of friendly competition as well.

My involvement in swimming and the challenges I've faced have taught me that, although things happen that are beyond my control, what is always in my control is how I respond to

those challenges. I've also learned that while I may be motivated to achieve a particular goal, the process of working towards that goal may offer unexpected rewards. Still, although the exhilaration of training for and finishing a race may always be what drives me, the friendships created in my athletic life will always be part of who I am. Experiencing that kind of connection and support has enhanced my appreciation for and ability to provide that support for others, not just in the pool, but for the rest of my life.