



# Road to Character First: A STUDENT-ATHLETE'S JOURNEY TO EXCELLENCE ADRIANA SMITH

Adriana loves to swim. Here she is at the 2019 PLS Senior Open Long Course meet. Photo by Fred Stambaugh.

With the city's mild temperatures, world-class facilities, and proximity to top swim colleges such as Cal, it's not surprising that Lafayette is home to nationally recognized aquatics training programs that have produced collegiate, national, and Olympic athletes. The journey to academic and athletic excellence, however, is rigorous, disciplined, and at times rugged. Meet Adriana Smith, a Campolindo student who attributes who she is today to her years of swim training.

With the encouragement of her mother, a former collegiate swimmer, Adriana began swimming at the age of 5 with Orinda Park Pool in the summer OMPA league. Missing the water during the off-season, at the age of 10, Adriana switched to train year-round with Orinda Aquatics (OA), a nationally recognized USA Swimming program established in 1995.

Adriana had a rocky start with OA. She recalls OA founders and coaches' feedback: "Ronnie and Donnie (Heidary) never fail to remind me that when I started OA, I was terrible. My technique was tough to watch, and I didn't know how to work hard in practice. But I was told to "trust the process." As it turns out, the process involved many hours in the pool and a "character first" philosophy emphasizing integrity, humility, and team commitment in and out of the pool. Even as Adriana has suffered physical challenges, she persisted to improve her strokes, her times, and her ability to train harder each day.

It paid off. Adriana (now 16) is one of the top swimmers with OA. She is recognized as the OA record holder in both 100 and 200 backstroke, as well as a junior nationalist finalist and a U.S. Open qualifier. She says, "Looking back, I would never



L to R: Orinda Aquatics swimmers Emilia Barck, Lily Struemp, Adriana Smith, and Amber Van Meines.

have imagined that I would reach the point where I am now as a swimmer. Thanks to my great coaches and uplifting teammates, I am inspired to work hard, and I learned to push myself and train at a high level."

"Adriana has been an extraordinary example of a high-character student-athlete. She has demonstrated the highest level of discipline, maturity, detailed focus, and work ethic, and it is these characteristics that have led her to a national level of swimming, and to becoming the fastest backstroker in the history of Orinda Aquatics. Additionally, Adriana is humble and selfless and strives to be a better athlete and teammate on a daily basis. It has been a privilege and pleasure to coach her," remark OA coaches Don and Ron Heidary.

When asked how swimming has shaped her, Adriana answers: "Hard work, minimal procrastination, and a team-first attitude." A few mornings a week, she wakes up at 5:15 a.m. to train. Then she is off to school, trains again after school, and finally returns home to start homework with the goal of hitting her pillow by 10:30 p.m. With little free time, she still finds the bandwidth to draw and paint, pet sit for neighbors, and bake for her family. Adriana has learned to push herself academically and athletically; she plans to swim Division I in college.



Calling all students (and parents): If you have a passion or talent you would like to share, please contact Jamie at [Jamie.Cronk@n2pub.com](mailto:Jamie.Cronk@n2pub.com).



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