

2014 Speedo Junior Nationals – Irvine, California

Madelyn Donohoe

Junior Nationals was a first for all of us (Ian, Michele & me) - except of course Coach Ray. Ray knew every single coach/official there. This meet was a great learning experience for us all. It is something that I will always remember.

Ray and I arrived in California ahead of Ian & Michele (because Ian and Michelle flew first class to LAX on a different flight). At baggage claim, the first item out was a tiny lock with its key. Ray debated whether to grab it or to leave it. After awhile Ray chased after the tiny lock and grabbed it. I wasn't sure what he was going to do with the key, but he was very happy that he had it.

Coach Ray and I went straight from the airport to the pool and started our first practice. Michelle and Ian came about fifteen minutes later. We practiced twice a day each day of the meet - so we were VERY familiar with the pool and the aquatic center. After our first practice and we were leaving the pool, Michelle realized her flip flops were locked onto her swim bag. The scavenger hunt for Michelle's flip-flops began and continued through the entire meet. The flip-flops were on chain fences around the pool deck, attached to tents, behind scoreboards and a bunch more places. Now, I knew why Ray was happy he had the lock & key.

The Swimming

The pool is amazing. There are two 50 meter outdoor pools – a warm up and a competition pool. The environment around the pool during the meet was very cool. All the swimmers were very focused and having fun at the same time. The swimmers were from teams from all over the US. The competition pool had huge stands for spectators. There were large score boards to show the results. You felt like you were at a big meet, but everyone was very calm so you didn't get nervous. We all felt that we belonged at the pool and were very excited to swim.

Michelle had 100% best times at her first Junior Nationals and moved up in seed in each race! Ian got to meet with college coaches and so did Ray. Even though there was only a small group of us, we all watched each other's races and cheered for one another. We all had fun and really got to know each other and I knew we were a real team.

Summary of the meet

- First day was the 800 for Michelle and me and the 200 fly and 1500 for Ian. Ian dropped a bunch of time in the 1500. Michelle dropped and so did I in the 800.
- Second day Ian swam the 400 IM - gained a little bit, but hey it was fun. Michelle and I roamed and cheered for Ian.
- Third day Mitch and I both swam the 400 free and we both dropped some time. We swam this during time trials. This was my first time swimming time trials at a meet. Michelle and I swam next to each other and we had a lot of fun.
- Fourth day Mitch and I swam the 200 free. Michelle went a 2:04 dropping two seconds and I dropped two tenths. Ian got a day off and enjoyed that too. We swam the 200 during time trials and I got to race in the same heat as 200 breaststrokers.

- The last day of the meet was fun, and we didn't want it to end. Ian swam the 200 then met with some college recruiters. Michelle and I swam the 1500. I gained two seconds, Michelle dropped even more time! Mitch had a perfect meet!

The Fun

We made the annual visit to the Little Sheep Mongolian Hot Pot. No sheep bathed in the hot pot this time (sorry Veronica). At the Hot Pot we decided to try to be adventurist and tried the quail eggs. Ray refused to try.

After the first day we stopped by Michelle's hotel by the water and walked around this kind of gross little beach but it was really fun to spend time together. Ian really enjoyed collecting shells for himself too.

On our off day, we visited Hollywood. We drove through Rodeo Drive, but did not stop. Mitch and I said that next time we were stopping and window shopping! We checked out the Hollywood walk of stars. Ian was constantly being harassed to buy rapper CD's, and Ray enjoyed spying on the creepy characters especially the bunny guy. We also got to "speed shop" for souvenirs.

Every morning of the trip (while Ian and I waited to be picked up to go to the pool), Ian collected brochures of all the places to go in Los Angeles. Each day Ian would say we are going to this island, Hollywood star tracking, whale watching and a bunch of other funny tourist places that we knew we would never visit. It was really funny to see the pile of twenty something brochures in the back of the car.

One night, we all walked around this huge outdoor mall and went on a Ferris wheel. (Ray didn't because he is afraid of heights). On our final night in CA (after all of our races), we went to Laguna Beach (not Michelle) and swam in the Pacific Ocean. So we finally got to see the beach! Ian was very happy to finally see the real ocean.

The next day, Michelle left on her first class flight to China while Ian and I went to Disneyland. Ray taught us the perks of single rider and the day was really fun. Then we all boarded our red eye flight and flew home to VA.

Our first Juniors was over.