

The Influence of Being a Member of the DCY Swim Team~ Caitlyn Hasenjager

Being a member of the DCY Swim Team has greatly impacted my life, shaping who I am, improving my physical health, and helping me build important social connections. Swimming has become more than just a sport; it is a lifestyle that develops essential skills like work ethic, teamwork, responsibility, self-esteem, and discipline.

First, swimming has taught me the value of hard work. The early morning practices and the dedication needed to enhance my technique and endurance have shown me how important commitment is. Each lap in the pool reflects the time and effort I put into my own growth. I have realized that success in swimming, as well as in life, comes from hard work and perseverance. Whether I am aiming to beat my personal best or pushing through fatigue during a challenging workout, swimming has helped me cultivate a mindset that welcomes challenges and seeks continuous improvement.

Although swimming may seem like an individual sport at times, it is a team sport. Being part of the DCY Swim Team has taught me the importance of teamwork. We support each other during practices and competitions, cheering one another on and celebrating our achievements together. This camaraderie creates a sense of belonging and reinforces the idea that we are stronger together. I have learned that collaboration and communication are crucial elements of any successful team, and these skills will benefit me well beyond the pool.

Responsibility is another key lesson I have learned from my experience on the swim team. As a swimmer, I am accountable for my own training and performance, but I am also responsible for my teammates. This means being punctual, putting in the necessary effort, and motivating others. I have learned to prioritize my commitments and manage my time effectively, balancing schoolwork, swim practices, and social activities. This sense of responsibility has carried over into other areas of my life, helping me become a more dependable friend and student.

My involvement in the swim team has boosted my self-esteem. Every achievement, whether mastering a new stroke or reaching a personal best time, has contributed to my growing confidence. This newfound self-worth has impacted other parts of my life, encouraging me to take on challenges that I might have previously avoided. I now approach new opportunities with optimism and believe in my abilities.

Swimming has taught me discipline. The demanding training schedule requires consistency and focus. I have learned to set goals and follow a structured plan to reach them. This discipline goes beyond the pool, affecting my study habits and personal life. I feel I am more organized and determined, traits that will undoubtedly benefit me in my future endeavors.

Finally, swimming has greatly impacted my physical health. Regular practice has improved my endurance, strength, and overall fitness. I have come to recognize the importance of staying active and living a healthy lifestyle. The advantages of swimming go beyond physical health; it also helps me relieve stress, allowing me to unwind and recharge amid the pressures of school and life.

In summary, being part of the DCY Swim Team has significantly changed my life. Through swimming, I have developed a strong work ethic, embraced teamwork, taken on responsibility, boosted my self-esteem, cultivated discipline, and improved my physical health. These lessons will continue to influence my life and guide me as I move forward. The effects of swimming reach far beyond the water, enhancing my life in numerous ways.

Thank you- Caitlyn Hasenjager

Harrison Regan

La Crosse Area Family YMCA

Wave Swim Team

My parents, who were both swimmers, introduced me to the sport of swimming at a young age and I have loved it ever since. After being a member of the YMCA swim team for the past eight years, I truly believe it has shaped me into the person I am today. It has taught me many valuable lessons like the importance of teamwork and friendship, how to be a leader, and important skills like hard work, consistency, and goal setting. All of these are lessons and skills that I will continue to carry with me throughout the rest of my life.

One of the most meaningful aspects of being on a YMCA swim team is the teamwork and friendships that come along with it. Those who don't swim might consider it to be an individual sport, but that is not something I believe. Whether it is cheering for your teammates during races, or pushing friends to perform their best at practice, you're almost always with someone. You get to grow up with your teammates, celebrate with them, support them through hardships, and form bonds that will last a lifetime.

Another valuable lesson I have learned while being a member of a YMCA swim team is how to be a leader and mentor. Throughout the year our team pairs us with a younger swimmer to mentor and be a positive role model to. We exchange cards, give guidance, and check in on them during meets. This experience has helped me develop important leadership skills. Among them are how to inspire confidence, communicate, and be a positive role model to those younger than me. Getting to watch the younger swimmers on my team succeed has been amazing, and I've learned to appreciate the impact of being a leader.

Hard work and consistency are skills that I have developed over my time as a YMCA swimmer. Swimming is really about pushing yourself to break past your limits and improve. Whether it's working on your technique, overcoming mental barriers, or improving physical strength, I've learned that putting forth your best effort and staying consistent is crucial to success. I have also realized that each practice brings you closer to your goals. When you achieve your goals, you are rewarded with an amazing sense of accomplishment that really highlights the importance and value of hard work and consistency.

The final key skill I have learned and really value is goal setting. Through meets and

practices I have learned there is great value in setting both short and long term goals. Each practice or meet represents an opportunity to work towards the goals that you have set.

Whether it's a goal focused on technique, or a time based goal, there is nothing better to keep you on track and focused. You get a great feeling of fulfillment when you finally achieve a goal that you have been working towards.

Looking back on my eight years on a YMCA swim team, I realize how much I have gained. The valuable lessons of leadership, teamwork, consistency, and the importance of goal setting are not just applicable in the pool, but are also useful at school, in jobs, and I will continue to use them in the future. These skills and lessons highlight how the YMCA swim team has affected me and helped me grow as both an athlete and a person.

2025 Wisconsin & Upper Michigan YMCA Swimming Scholarship Essay

Vincent Clementi

Schroeder Swim Team

My time with a YMCA swim club might be shorter than many others, but the impact it has had on my life is just as great.

Growing up, my parents enrolled me in swim lessons at our local YMCA. While they were repeatedly asked if I would consider joining a swim club, they always declined because I was playing travel baseball, and at the time, swimming was something I had to do, not something I wanted to do. It wasn't until high school that I decided to give competitive swimming a shot on the Whitnall High School team. I made varsity as a freshman and made progress throughout my first two years, but it wasn't until my coach suggested to my parents that I had the potential to swim in college that I considered club. My high school teammate, Ethan Schutten, told me if I wanted to get better, Schroeder was the only option. Seeing what Schroeder had done for him, I took his advice.

My first practice with Schroeder was June 6th, 2023. The morning of my first practice with the team, I was nervous and excited. My first practice was not easy. I had been out of the pool for about 4 months at this point because I had played JV baseball, and I knew I wasn't as strong a swimmer as others on the team, having finished my sophomore year at 5:47.76 in the 500 free and 2:05.82 in the 200 free. That first practice was absolutely a struggle, but I also knew this was what I wanted to do. Over the summer, I met coaches and teammates that would completely change the trajectory of my swimming career. I quickly immersed myself in the team, training six days a week for two hours at a time. I was hooked and I fell in love with the grind of swimming every day. These teammates, many of whom I'd been looking up to for the past two years, made the grind worth it, and were super supportive of my progress every day. The energy during the main sets and friendly rivalries kept everything fun and competitive.

By the time my junior high school season approached, I cut my time in the 100 free by 7 seconds and the 200 free by 10 seconds to 1:55.18. I made my goal of competing at state that year, and decided to walk away from baseball so I could focus on swimming full time. My senior year I hit the podium at numerous invitationals and competed at state in four events.

Even though I joined Schroeder later than many others, the impact that the organization, Coach

Chandler and my teammates have had on me is immeasurable. Before I joined Schroeder, I liked swimming, now I love it. I didn't even know YMCA Nationals existed, now it is my goal to attend yet this year. I can definitively say that without the discipline, techniques and leadership that I learned at Schroeder, I would not be looking forward to a college swimming career at UW-Eau Claire. Schroeder and YMCA swimming didn't just make me a better athlete; they taught me the value of perseverance, dedication, and embracing challenges. I'm excited to carry these lessons into my college swimming career at UW-Eau Claire.

Lauren Zarecki

La Crosse Area Family YMCA

Jon Brenner Scholarship

For as long as I can remember, I have been swimming. From my first parent-child swim class to being a senior role model on my swim team, swimming has been an integral part of my life. The YMCA has been my second home throughout it all. I believe that my coaches have played a crucial role in not only the athlete, but the person I have become. I am fortunate to have Sam Bowman as my head coach. Coach Sam was coached by Jon Brenner and continues to foster Jon's values through his own coaching.

Through my coaches at the YMCA, I have learned the valuable lesson of goal setting and the importance of actively working toward it. They have shown me that achieving goals does not happen overnight, and that the most important progress is made on the days I least want to show up. As I continue to work hard in and out of the pool, I see this determination show through in all aspects of my life. Through the YMCA, I have learned the patience and dedication I will need during my next steps in life on a college campus.

Remaining dedicated even through failure is another valuable lesson my time at the YMCA has taught me. Like every athlete, I have had plenty of ups and downs throughout my swimming journey. A key quality I have developed is my ability to persevere. Working hard toward a goal and still falling short are lessons only gained through experience. While racing, I have missed my goal time by as little as 0.03 seconds. That feeling of defeat is what drives me to put forth my best effort every single day. I see this quality present in my academic life as well. There are many ups and downs when it comes to higher learning, and working through difficult tasks has become more manageable because I know that the best way forward is to keep going. Along with the racing component of swimming, there were also out of the water opportunities to grow and connect. Every Christmas I remember getting a 'buddy' at the swim team Christmas party. This 'buddy' would be one of the 'big kids' on the team. They would swim with me and answer any questions I had. I think of these memories often now that I am the 'big kid'. I reflect on the impact these seemingly 'old and wise' teammates had on my life and hope that I benefit young swimmers now. While our buddies at Christmas time look a little different now, I continue to mentor young teammates throughout the whole season. The

awareness I have gained of how I can positively affect others will carry on into my next chapter of college swimming.

Seeing Jon Brenner's legacy carried on by Coach Sam has shown me the impact he has had on our team. When my mom asked if I had ideas for this year's YMCA State t-shirts, I suggested we put his quote "With a team behind you, so much more is possible" on the back. I can clearly see Jon's positive influence on who I have become, and I wouldn't be where I am today without my time spent at the YMCA - my second home.

Amy Hu - Schroeder Swim Team YMCA

The average person's earliest memories begin from around age three, and anything before that blends into oblivion - scientifically known as childhood amnesia. Yet, my earliest memory consists of me at age two, in the Saukville YMCA pool first learning to blow bubbles in the water. My memory then returns into oblivion until after I joined a YMCA club team at age four and a half, meeting my first swim coach, and becoming his designated backstroke demonstrator. From then on, this sport became my life.

One day, at a small conference meet held by my club team, I made my first YMCA state cut in 2016. Up until this point I had been swimming with no real goal in mind, and as the eldest child in my family, my immigrant parents were new to the system of athletics. Unbeknownst to me or my parents, I had just opened up the doors to the competitive swimming world through achieving this cut. In attending my very first YMCA state meet, I created one of - if not the - most vivid memories of my childhood: I met my very first lifelong friend. From this meet, the only thing I could remember was not the times I swam, but the strange girl that was cheering for random people alongside me and competing with me for who could cheer louder.

From there, my memory meshed the successes, failures, and glory in my competitions up until quarantine lockdown into a blur, and at age 12 I was scaling the tidal wave of my swimming career thus far, claiming many gold medals and even team records. All I could remember feeling going into the lockdown era was that my swimming career had gone nothing but smooth, and I arrogantly expected it to continue that way.

After finally returning to regular routines after the pandemic, my swimming suffered, and my memories seemingly drowned me. My recollection of this time conglomerates into one, densely packed stormcloud. Yet, even in the toughest of times, I found the light in going to practice everyday; the tight knit community of friends in my YMCA team - my second family - became my safe haven despite the sport itself contributing to my traumas. During this entire ordeal, I never once doubted that I was alone, and I knew that I would always have a teammate, coach, or even competitor to lift me up and support me - even when my parents couldn't.

My swim team, Schroeder Swim Team YMCA, has been with me for my entire life.

Without the privilege of attending YMCA meets and experiencing the intimate YMCA team community, I would have never regained my love for this sport, pushed myself to fight beyond

my densely packed stormcloud, and become the determined and passionate athlete and person I am today. Without my membership in a YMCA team, most of the vivid memories of my childhood would have been lost to the odds of childhood amnesia, and the little girl in me that just began learning how to blow bubbles would have been forgotten. It is for that little girl that I, too, aspire to create a powerful and inspiring experience for others on my YMCA team, and give back to the team and to the world what my swim team has given me.

Camille Johnson
LAXY Wave Swim Team
La Crosse area YMCA

When I joined the WAVE in sixth grade, I never imagined how it would shape my life, and get me to where I am today. Over the last six years, I have grown tremendously- not just as a swimmer but as a person, and a friend. This sport and team have shaped me into the athlete and person I am today, and I wouldn't be where I am without it.

I started off my swimming career with the good 'ole swim lessons. We moved around a few times when I was little, and I never had the opportunity to join a swim team. However, when we moved to La Crosse the summer before sixth grade, we joined the YMCA. Initially, I was against the idea of joining the swim team. I was convinced to start fresh by learning how to be a flexible gymnast, with no prior experience. During that time my mom kept encouraging me to think about joining the swim team. My stubborn self resisted it at first, but when I finally caved in and gave it a shot for her, I immediately fell in love. Being new to the area, I didn't have many friends. Joining the swim team at the Y curated the beginning of some lifelong connections. I started off at the junior level and made friends that I have been with throughout my entire swim career. We have truly been through it all together and created so many memories that I will always treasure. This team has become my family over the years and it wouldn't have been without the YMCA and the values that it upholds.

Swimming is a sport where you give it your all 100% of the time and go through many mental and physical battles. You spend countless hours swimming back and forth all to swim a little faster in your next race, but the biggest part about this sport is the people you endure all of these things with. Everyone at practice is pushing through that last set and is just trying to make themselves better. Going through all of this together truly creates a bond that can't be beat by anything else. These people that I have spent all these hours with are some of my closest friends. They have seen me at my worst and my best, and I cherish everything that they have done for me. We have been together for grueling workouts, our victories, and all of our failures, but if I hadn't joined the YMCA swim team, I wouldn't have them by my side today.

Aside from swimming, this sport and the YMCA have taught me how to be a better person whether that is with my interactions with people or with my time management. Constantly juggling the busy life of a swimmer and student has forced me to adapt and learn how to get my things done on time and efficiently, while still prioritizing the important things. It teaches the art of being disciplined and productive, along with grit and perseverance which is different from any other sport. It also shows you how to understand other people better and be kinder.

Looking back, I am beyond grateful that I chose to listen to my mom and join the YMCA team. I have learned many lifelong lessons through this sport; each one building up my character and making me a better person while giving me a sense of belonging. This team has truly built me into the person I am today, and in life, I will be that much better off from it.