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Fast Lane to Swim Success

By Lou Fancher



Lauren Bugglin Photos Debi Pettit

When Lauren Bugglin first hit water, everything clicked. The Moraga athlete, already involved in cross country, basketball and softball, joined the Miramonte Swim Club (MSC) Gators at the advanced age of 15. "A friend of mine kept asking and asking me, 'Why not join a swim team?'" Bugglin says, explaining her decision.

While most teenage swimmers have years of experience in the pool, Bugglin swam the MSC time trials—the early-season swims used to establish baseline times—not even sure how to flip turn.

"I'm visual, as a learner," says Bugglin, describing how she watched the other swimmers closely to catch on. She not only caught on, she caught up. Today, just four years later, she is setting pool records at Santa Rosa Junior College (SRJC) and ranked third in all her events at this year's California Community College Athletic Association's state swim meet.

Her rapid rise in just four years is due not only to her natural athletic ability, but to strong coaching. MSC's individualized approach was Bugglin's springboard to Orinda Aquatics (OA), where coach Don Heidary took the novice swimmer to the next level. "At OA, hard work isn't asked for, it's expected," says Bugglin.

A hard decision swiftly followed her first season at OA: accept the starting center fielder position on Campolindo High School's softball team, or sign up for the swim team. After weeks of consideration, Bugglin made the choice. "I thought I'd gotten all I could out of softball and knew I'd always think, 'What if?' if I hadn't tried swimming," she says.

Bugglin has little tendency towards regret, but admits she "did kind of look over the fence at what they (the softball team) were doing." With the support of her family and coaches, Bugglin defined herself as a swimmer. Backstroke became her favorite. "I like being able to breath," she says, half-joking. Her best time in the 50 Back is 26:82.

Bugglin's freshman year at Sonoma State, a school without a swim team, taught her how much she missed the sport. "I missed the camaraderie," she recalls, "When everyone's going through the same thing together, you feel tired, but you also feel energized, mentally." Transferring mid-year to SRJC was the next move in her swim career. SRJC has a dominant program; they have won four state championships in seven years, including back-to-back titles in 2008 and 2009. Head coach Jill McCormick was another perfect match for Bugglin. "I'd never had a girl coach before and I really clicked with that," she says.

McCormick was the California Community College Coach of the Year in 2009, 2008, 2007, 2005 and 2004. The team is recognized for producing All Americans who bring an elite athlete's focus to both the pool and the classroom. For Bugglin, the fact that Coach McCormick was a two-time All American in the backstroke was a plus.

Unlike in an actual race, Bugglin's greatest advantage may be her late start. With only four years in the water, she's not burned out, and is able to say, without reservation, "I love swimming because I feel light and fluid in the water. I feel fast, smooth...everything just clicks."



Photos Debi Pettit

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