

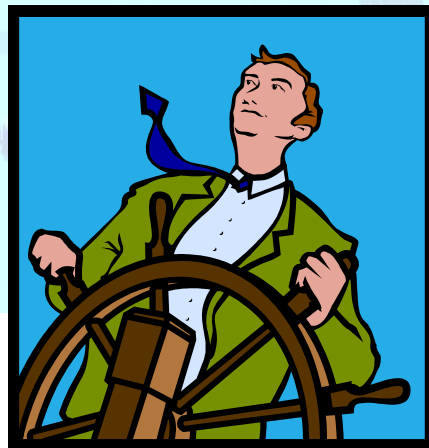
Thank you for putting

Character First

and for leading this extraordinary team both in and out of the pool.



With love and appreciation, Ronnie & Donnie



*“Success is not measured by what a man accomplishes, but by the opposition he has encountered,
and the courage with which he has maintained the struggle against overwhelming odds.”*

Lindbergh



Graduating Class of 2011

Average GPA – 3.75

Name	High School	College	Notes
<i>Jordan Tomimatsu</i> <i>Team Captain</i>	Bishop O'Dowd	Fordham University <i>Swimming</i>	Jr Nat'l SC Qualifier/Sr Nat'l SC Scholastic All-American Team Captain/Coach's Award(s) "Dragon Ambassador"
<i>Courtney Whyte</i> <i>Team Captain</i>	Campolindo	University of Notre Dame <i>Swimming</i>	Jr National Qualifier/Sr Nat'l SC Virginia Hall Award Winner Swimming/Scholastic All-American
<i>Sloan Caldwell</i>	Campolindo	Claremont McKenna <i>Swimming</i>	Sectional Qualifier Double DFAL Finalist Scholar Athlete
<i>Chris Leon</i>	Berean Christian	UC Santa Barbara <i>Swimming</i>	Jr National Qualifier/Sr Nat'l SC Swimming/Scholastic All-American High School Team Captain
<i>Clay Sanders</i>	Campolindo	Duke University <i>Swimming</i>	Jr National Qualifier, NCS Team Champion, Scholastic All-American National Merit/Eagle Scout
<i>Padon Sivesind</i>	Campolindo	Cal Poly (SLO) <i>Swimming</i>	Santa Clara International Swimming/Scholastic All-American National Merit, Coaches Award(s)
<i>Jeffrey Strausser</i>	Campolindo	Brown University <i>Swimming</i>	Jr National Qualifier/Sr Nat'l SC NCS team champion/NCS Record All American
<i>Caitlin Hamilton</i>	San Ramon	UC Davis	Far Western Qualifier Academic All-American Candidate SRVHS Leadership
<i>Eva Erickson</i>	Campolindo	TCU	Santa Clara International
<i>Steph Wraith</i>	San Ramon	William and Mary Club swimming	Far Western Qualifier National Merit, AP Scholar (honors) Academic All-American Candidate
<i>Callie Roberts</i>	College Prep	Duke University	Far Western Qualifier Academic All-American Candidate National Academic Award – Invited to White House (met President)

"To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment." Ralph Waldo Emerson

Letter from Donnie and Ronnie

(Reprint)

As time and years go on, we become more convinced that what can and should be gained from sports is truly invaluable and can be life-changing. For the countless hours committed, the physical, emotional, and financial commitment, and the sacrifices made, there has to be more than a time at the end of this process. Every time we see a youth sports team, from t-ball to collegiate athletics, we wonder what will be the *real* reward from all of this. After thirty years, we have no doubt that sports does have the ability to effect extraordinarily positive changes in an athlete's life. From a general youth perspective, you can walk through any mall, high school campus, or pool deck for that matter and see foundations of character and integrity slipping away. Too few want to be a character role model. The "process" is getting lost and with it, so are the virtues of team commitment, work ethic, sacrifice, and on and on. Regarding respect and discipline, we talk to coaches regularly about how they are "losing the battle" with kids. The pull of apathy, self-indulgement, drugs, alcohol, insecurity, and bravado seem to trump integrity, service, humility, and discipline. Too many sports teams are dominated by ego over humility, selfishness over selflessness, disrespect over respect, and doing the minimum rather than embracing work ethic. It is not simply that there are a few problematic athletes on a team, but rather there may only be a few true character leaders, which brings us to your children and our team.

Our Mission as Coaches

We would first though, like to reiterate our mission, philosophy, and intent, with regard to Orinda Aquatics, our coaching careers, and what we want to be doing with our lives. It is our intention and desire to be more than coaches, but rather partners with our swimmers on their athletic journey, and to a greater extent, partners on their life journey. Our ultimate goal is that four or eight years from now they are swimming at their very best, loving the sport, are leaders on their team, and are better people. And there is no one meet on that path that will define it more than the process reflected in the quote below, "*it is produced in the great manufacture of daily duty.*" We have always wanted this team and the environment to be different and to stand apart from the norm. The best and first way to achieve this is to care "intensely" about people and their well-being first and swimming second. We do not and have never viewed our relationship or support ending when practice ends or when we leave a meet. It is the least we can do for their commitment to swimming, to Orinda Aquatics, and to us. In short, your children have our unconditional support in the pool and out.

"Prepare the child for the path, not the path for the child."

We would like to attempt to describe the team environment and try to do justice to this group. This has been unequivocally the greatest "character group" we have seen in thirty years. It may sound redundant as we praise them often, but we really do believe that this group sets a standard that is unmatched by any high school athletic group in the country. Our swimmers, your children, demonstrate not *some* of the qualities, but *all* of the qualities you would hope to find in the finest person, let alone athlete.

They possess humility rarely seen in young adults, or actually anyone. It is humility almost to a fault, and to a person. Whether new to the group, a four-year veteran, a beginning swimmer or a national qualifier, there is no self-promotion, no spotlight, *and no* ego. Attention and praise is always deflected. On too many teams one can tell the success of a swimmer by the way in which they carry themselves. On Orinda Aquatics, it almost seems to be a race to be the most humble as opposed to being the most celebrated.

As kids today are challenged with academic pressure, social pressure, and athletic demands, your children find balance, find a way to make it work, and succeed. They respect academics and embrace it as a foundation of their life. They are the community example, if not the national example of the quintessential student/athlete. While many can excel in one area, few can have the self-discipline to set an alarm at 4:45 in the morning, take pool covers off in the wind and rain, push themselves physically and emotionally every day (of the year), sacrifice countless opportunities, and simultaneously commit to the highest academic standards. It takes a special person to be a great student, a great athlete, and a great person in this day and yes, in this community.

Additionally, they could not be more respectful, helpful, supportive, and sincere. How many coaches, teachers, administrators, could walk away from fifty teenagers with *complete* confidence that there would be no drop-off in activity, effort, or focus, and that the thought of doing less would not enter anyone's mind? How many coaches can have a fifty meter pool set up for every workout without ever asking anyone to do anything? There is never a "why me" or a "do I have to" attitude. It is incredibly refreshing and a great source of pride to see even the least glamorous parts of swimming treated with such respect, and with a positive attitude. How many coaches can take fifty athletes (of any sport) on a four day travel trip and have absolute assurance that their behavior would be impeccable - from everyone? Our team continues to rebuff the notion that kids need to be chaperoned. To the contrary, mature, caring, respectful, young adults do not. Oversight is always a character issue and not an age issue. They clearly prove that. Whether it is an activity at the pool or a cross-country trip, their character does not change and neither does the respect or behavior. We honestly feel sorry for teams, coaches, and parents that do not get to experience this. Most teams look for "leaders" or high character kids with a team captain-like mentality, that special one or two that might improve the environment and make the team better. College coaches want "good, positive, kids". That is our team. Not one, two, or five, but fifty.

Your children represent much more than swimming. Regarding "life lessons", they are life lessons and will be life's leaders. They are inspirational stories, individually and collectively. While they will be successful, it will be their humility, character, and work ethic that drive their lives and impact others. We thank them for putting "character (and the team) first" and thank you for sharing them with us and allowing them to represent this team as the pinnacle of youth sports and young adults. And we want to thank you again for your support and hope that you share in the pride of this great organization. Donnie & Ronnie

"The great difference between voyages rests not with the ship but with the people you travel with." Amelia Barr



The middle class watches. The “world class” cheers (and cares).

The great ones choose discipline over pleasure.

The great ones don’t give back. They just give.

The middle class competes. The world class creates.

The middle class loves comfort. The world class is comfortable being uncomfortable.

The middle class cares about themselves. The world class cares.

The middle class lives in delusion. The world class lives in reality.

The middle class is frustrated. The world class is grateful.

The middle class wants. The world class sacrifices.

The middle class has dreams. The world class has vision.

Orinda Aquatics Accomplishments

Under *your* watch!



(From a team of less than 100 swimmers)

- Club Excellence, Silver Medal Team
- Club Recognition, Level 4 (of 4, only ten on the west coast)
- One of the best “small” teams in the nation (by USA Swimming Virtual Club Championships)
- American Swimming Magazine feature as “Best Practices” in USA Swimming
- Orinda Aquatics coaches give a USA Swimming On-Line Seminar on character in young athletes
- One of the highest percentages of Scholastic All-Americans and swimmers going on to swim in college in the nation
- Initiated a “Character Camp” in 2011 (with this group as a model)
- OA Highlighted on USA Swimming website for “giving back” in support of Swaziland swimming
- Coaches asked to speak at ASCA Clinic on putting “Character First”
- Three Senior National Qualifiers (Two LC, one SC)
- Seven Junior National Qualifiers
- Seventeen swimmers qualified for Santa Clara International
- Thirty-three Sectional Qualifiers
- Nearly sixty Far Western Qualifiers

“We cannot achieve our wildest dreams by remaining who we are.”

John Maxwell

Leadership Principles for Graduates

John Maxwell

Seven Steps to Success

1. Commit to growing daily
2. Value the process more than the events
3. Don't wait for inspiration
4. Be willing to sacrifice comfort for opportunity
5. Dream big
6. Plan your priorities
7. Give up to go up

"You will be as small as your controlling desire, or as large as your dominant aspiration." James Allen

Seven Secrets of Success

1. There is no secret to success
2. Success is for everyone
3. Your life becomes better only when you become better
4. There is no success without sacrifice
5. Success is achieved in inches not miles
6. The great enemy of tomorrow's success is today's success
7. No advice on success works unless you do

"Cherish your visions and your dreams as they are the children of your soul; the blueprints of your ultimate achievements."

Napoleon Hill

The Cornerstones of Orinda Aquatics



Character

"Character is what you are in the dark."

"A man never discloses his own character so clearly as when he describes another's."
Jean Paul Richer

"Any fool can criticize, condemn, or complain, but it takes character and compassion to be understanding and forgiving." Dale Carnegie

Humility

"When it is all over, it's not who you were. It is whether you made a difference."

"Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less." Rick Warren

"Humility is the necessary veil to all other graces." William Gurnall

Academics

"All of your scholarship, all of your study...would be in vein if at the same time you did not build your character and attain mastery over your thoughts and your actions."
Mahatma Gandhi

Athletics

"The gem cannot be polished without friction." "Adversity introduces a man to himself."

"I am a member of a team, and I rely on the team. I defer to it and sacrifice for it, because the team is the ultimate champion." Mia Hamm

"Great works are performed not by strength but by perseverance." Samuel Johnson

To the Parents



Congratulations on raising the class of youth anywhere - of students, of athletes, and of people.

Their discipline, maturity, respect, and humility is the by-product of your love, support, and sacrifice. You have raised and created young men and women who have profoundly impacted our team, their peers, and the community, and they will undoubtedly influence future generations and the world. You are the silent heroes in this success story and the “we” in “we did it”.

Thank you and congratulations!



“The mother eagle teaches her little ones to fly by making their nest uncomfortable so that they are forced to leave it and commit themselves to the unknown world of air outside.”

Courtney Whyte, Notre Dame



I never thought it would be time to sit down and write my senior farewell letter, let alone leave Orinda Aquatics and start the next chapter of my life. I find it hard to come up with words to describe the last seven years I have spent on this team. It seems like only yesterday that I walked on deck at the Soda Center for my first OA practice, the summer before I started middle school, with a few of my friends from my last year-around team. And now seven years later I'm saying bye to some of the best friends I could ever imagine and the coaches who have helped shape me into the athlete, student, and person that I am today.

This team has taught me so much more than I would have ever imagined. To start, it's not very common to find a competitive sports team where character is valued more than talent. Not only have I learned dedication, humility, and sportsmanship from my years on the team, but I've also learned to see the big picture in everything I pursue and to always look at life with a positive attitude. As I get ready to start a new chapter in my life I will always cherish the opportunities I have been fortunate enough to have and the lessons I have learned from the numerous articles and team meetings.

Thank you, Matt and Marc, for making my first three years on the team so much fun. You somehow managed to always allow us to have fun but still work hard. Thank you Marc for always supporting us, having such positive feedback, and teaching us discipline (and for the 25s fly, each from a dive, because we had been anything but attentive!). And thank you Matt for always believing in me and pushing me harder and harder in practice each day (and for the 500 Free's for time while everybody else was in the warm showers!). You more than prepared me for the senior group and I couldn't thank you more for that.

Thank you, Donnie, for always keeping the bigger picture in mind and preaching character. Thanks for always keeping us positive even if the weather was not optimal. Your dedication to not only the team but to the sport of swimming as a whole is truly inspiring to all of us. Thanks so much for all of your support for my teammates and myself.

Ronnie, where do I even start? Thank you so much for never "cutting the cord." I can't even begin to express how much I appreciate all your guidance, and the time and effort you have put into helping me grow not only as a swimmer but also as a person. Thank you for pushing me during practice to allow me to reach my full potential. Thank you for always dealing with my "faces," as you would call them. And thank you for being so much more than just a coach. I will never forget some of our conversations on the deck, whether they were about the salamanders that were in danger at the bottom of the ocean, the economic collapse that we were experiencing, or even the end of the world in twenty twelve (thanks for offering me your freeze dried food even though I'm pretty confident I will not be needing it). I can't thank you enough for all of your support; you have helped me grow significantly as both a person and an athlete.

Thanks Mom and Dad for all your love and support. Thank you for always believing in me and pushing me to do my best. Thanks for driving me to morning practice at 5 AM three days a week and for working all of the long meets in rain or shine. I couldn't have done it without you.

Lastly, thank you fellow seniors and teammates for making the last seven years I have spent on this team truly unforgettable. Thank you for all of your support and inspiration. Through the good and bad, my years on OA have been filled with memories that I will always cherish. Love, Courtney Whyte

Jordan Tomimatsu, Fordham University



Dear OA,

Five years ago if you asked me if I would be swimming today, my answer would have been no. Before I joined Orinda Aquatics I was seriously considering ending my swimming career forever. After only a few days on the team, my outlook on swimming completely changed. Everyone on the team was so nice and welcoming to me. Matt and Mark were such amazing coaches to have before joining the senior group. They prepared me for the challenges to come.

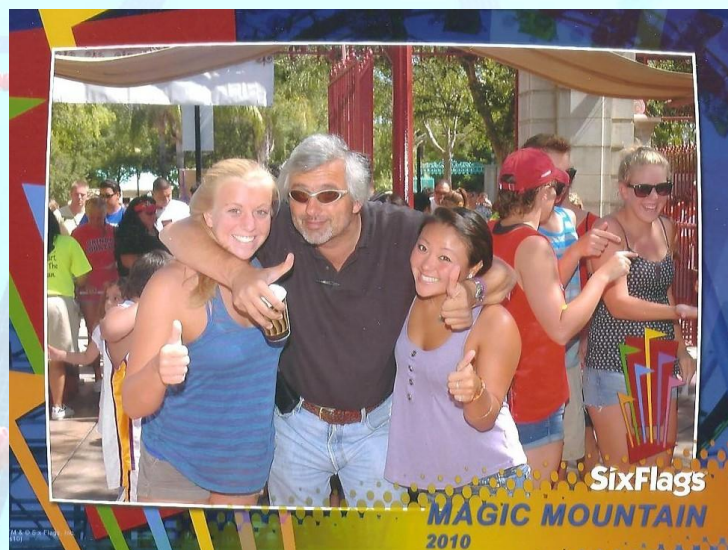
Matt, thank you for taking my swimming to a new level. If it wasn't for you, I don't know if I would have ever swum 200 butterfly. You pushed me and believed in my abilities, even when I didn't believe in myself. Mark, thank you for always making swimming fun. It is because of both of you that I kept swimming and enjoyed every day of practice.

Dave, thank you so much for always being there for me through the good times and bad. You always know how I am really feeling. I have missed seeing you on the deck this summer, and will miss you even more once I leave for college. I greatly enjoyed our talks and I know I can always tell you what is on my mind.

Ronnie, thank you so much for all you have done for me and my swimming. When I first joined your group, I didn't think I was going to make it. Every post warm up set was like a main set for me. One day I will successfully make 3x100 free on the 1:05. You have never lost faith in me and push me to better myself. Whenever I am swimming backstroke I will forever think about you and how you push me to white water kick all the time. You have improved my swimming so much and next year is just not going to be the same without you as my coach.

Donnie, thank you so much for all your insight into life and swimming. You pushed me through so many difficult sets and swims throughout the years; I couldn't have done it without you. You have shaped me both as a swimmer and a person. I'll never forget the infamous white board sets and trying to guess what the workout was going to be for the day, or the 2,000 swim for time. I have so many memories swimming in your group. You helped me so much through my college process with all of our long talks and research you had me do. You always have made me look to the future and keep the big picture in mind. I'll miss you dearly next year.

Lastly, I would like to thank my teammates. You guys have gotten me through so many difficult times in my swimming career. I have so many fun-filled memories with all of you. All of the travel trips have been so much fun and such good bonding experiences. I would have never thought I would have made so many lifetime best friends. Swimming on this team has such a positive impact on my life and has changed my life forever.
Love Jordan



Padon Sivesind, Cal Poly



Dear Orinda Aquatics,

When I first joined Orinda Aquatics in 8th grade, I was terrified. I didn't think that I would ever fit in with the close-knit Junior Group, or be able to successfully complete the practices that were much harder than I was used to. When I entered the Senior Group the next year both of these fears resurfaced. But, the truth is, I never should have been worried about these things. OA is filled with the most welcoming and supportive kids that I have ever had the honor of meeting. My teammates have helped me get through many practices that I would have never thought I could finish; creating a bond that has made them my closest friends.

The bond that I share with my teammates is part of what makes Orinda Aquatics a unique team, and I am so glad that I have been a part of it. I have always been able to count on my teammates to support me if I am going to a rough patch, and I know that I can trust them with anything. And to all of you who still have time left on this team: remember to stay focused on the positive through good and bad times. Your time on this team really does go by faster than you would ever believe, and you should make the most of it. If something (like a meet) doesn't go the way you want, don't get too caught up in it because it doesn't really matter in the end. The friends that you have made, not the times you achieved will end up being the most important.

The other part of OA that is unique is the coaches. I do not think that coaches like Ronnie and Donnie can be found anywhere else in the world, and we are unbelievably lucky to be coached by them. They are extremely caring, genuine, and funny people who dedicate their lives to coaching this team and give us good advice both on swimming and in life. Through the countless articles that I have read and meetings that I have sat through, I think that Ronnie and Donnie have taught me to be a character-first athlete. I know that I could not have learned this on any other team, and that this quality will continue to help me throughout my life. Ronnie and Donnie are the best coaches that I could have asked for, and I am extremely grateful to have them as my coaches.

Thank you to everyone on this team because you have all somehow changed my life for the better. Whether it has been setting an example for me to follow, or saying something funny that made my day brighter, you have all inspired me. I hope that you have the wonderful experience of OA that I did with just as many memories.

Thank you to Ronnie and Donnie for always believing in me, and for teaching me many invaluable lessons. I will miss you both very much next year. Love, Padon

Steph Wraith, William & Mary



Dear Ronnie, Donnie, Dave, and the whole OA Family,

Joining a new team is never easy; this is especially true when you're going into your junior year of high school and have just left behind the team you'd been a part of for the past four years of your life. To say that I was feeling a certain degree of trepidation about stepping out onto the pool deck my first day of OA practice would be something of an understatement. Yet from the moment the first greeting was called out, the first introduction made, I knew that I had found something special. I joined the team disillusioned and burnt-out, on the verge of quitting swimming entirely, but two years later I head off to college determined to participate in at least club-level swimming. I know you hear all the time about what a fantastic program you have on OA, but I just wanted to reiterate how true that is. Your coaching - and the amazing fellow swimmers I met - helped to remind me why I fell in love with the sport in the first place. I just wanted to thank all of you for giving me the opportunity to enjoy swimming again. I'm currently junior coaching for the rec team I first started out on, and every day while working with the younger swimmers I'm reminded of just how rewarding swimming can be. I'm so glad that I took a chance and came to OA instead of just giving up. The program you have is truly incredible, and I'm grateful for having been a part of it, even for a short time.

To the coaches: Thank you so much for treating your swimmers as human beings, and not just athletes, for proving to be an incredible exception to the rule, for every declaration of "Character First", and for believing in me even when I struggled to do the same. OA is a one-of-a-kind program, and I appreciated the opportunity to be a part of it, even for a short time. Thank you so much for your dedication, advice, and commitment to building an environment that is "character first".

To the swimmers: Many of you probably don't remember me, or maybe we've never even met. Regardless, know that you are a truly inspirational group of people – thank you for welcoming a total stranger with open arms. Orinda Aquatics changed my life, and I don't think I'll ever be able to fully convey my gratitude for that. If there's one thing I've learned from the ups and downs of my swimming experience, it's that everything happens for a reason. So step out of your comfort zone, take the path less travelled by, and never be afraid to be true to yourself – after all, in the end it is our choices that show us who we truly are, far more than our abilities.

Stephanie Wraith



Chris Leon, UC Santa Barbara

Joining OA at the start of my junior year is what I consider one of my best choices I have made up to this point of my life. I have not only learned more about swimming than I ever could have imagined, but also I have gleaned numerous life lessons from Ronnie, Donnie, and Dave that I will carry for the rest of my life. My teammates have also taught and inspired me more than they know.

The first time I dove into the water for my first practice at OA I knew something was different. First of all everyone was extremely fast and I was wondering how in the world I would ever keep up. All I had known up until this point was the rec swimming world. My nervousness was quickly erased as the team welcomed me in through various activities, one of which was long boarding after practice on Saturday's. I remember an incident during my first week on the team. We were playing capture the flag on the tennis courts when I incurred an injury that landed me in the sports med room. Even though my teammates barely even knew me, they still helped me walk, or rather limp, to help. This seemed to be the theme of OA. I learned this through the team meetings and the character first motto.

Orinda Aquatics has given me many experiences over the past two years. During my junior year in Dave's group, I remember training with Clay and Riley. After an exciting summer I started to become better acquainted with Ronnie and Donnie. I remember asking Donnie at the beginning of my senior year about college and what to do for the first time. He told me that while I was getting a late start, they would do anything they could to help me. And they both helped me find the right college and one that seems like a great fit. Ronnie was as much a source of pain (in a workout sense) throughout the year as he was a friend. I cannot say I remember a day this past year when I was not sore from swimming. And, with regularity, Ronnie would bring up my lack of a stomach muscle. He would usually say, "Chris if you are as fast as you are without a single stomach muscle imagine how fast you could be if you had one, or six. You could probably break the American record." I also learned from Ronnie that he is always right. Do yourself a favor and do not doubt him.

As I reflect upon the past two years they have been full of memories that I will never forget, and I have Dave, Donnie, and Ronnie to thank. Dave, I thank you for giving me the love of dry land workouts. The world of college may seem overwhelming, but I thank Donnie for helping me sort my way through it to eventually find the right school. Ronnie, I thank you for pushing me beyond the level that I believed I could achieve. Without you pushing me, I firmly believe I would not be where I am today (even if I have yet to capture that elusive stomach muscle). I have learned much in these amazing past two years of my life on OA, and again, I thank again Dave, Donnie, and Ronnie for all that they have given and all they have done for me.

Chris Leon



Clay Sanders, Duke University

Dear Orinda Aquatics Swimmers, Coaches, & Families,

To say my two years as a member of this team have been transformative would be an understatement. Just in quantifiable terms—times, standards, workout groups—I have progressed more than I could ever have imagined. Two years of training and challenging sets, more laps and yards than I care to count, they have pushed my physical limits to new heights. I have become fastidious with stroke technique, obsessive with perfect pacing, and capable of attacking even the most herculean of sets with a “warrior mentality.” But reflecting upon my time on the team, I come away with much more than an appreciation for the physical strength and ability I have developed.

There’s a quote Ronnie and Donnie often give us—by Theodore Roosevelt, one so simple and seemingly trite it is easy to dismiss it: “Character, in the long run, is the decisive factor in the life of an individual and of nations alike.” In the midst of the twenty plus hours we spend a week swimming, the concept of strengthening one’s character might seem pretty abstract. It is much easier to focus on the tangible aspects of swimming—times, races, and championships—or even just to survive through practices. Yet ultimately, the outcomes of races, our victories or failures, do not really define our swimming careers or personal growth. Rather, how we choose to spend our hours and hours of training defines us as athletes and people. Through our daily decisions to face challenges or flee from them, to support teammates or focus on ourselves, to make an extra effort or take a path of least resistance, we determine our own success and the success of the team. There’s a reason we have meetings about character every week and that each workout is printed with an inspirational quote. Each practice and set offers us the opportunity to grow more mature and disciplined. While getting stronger may be the immediate benefit of swimming, in the long run, it’s character growth and friendship that counts.

Thank you Ronnie, Donnie, Dave, Matt, and Marc for your commitment to help each of us reach our potential, both personally and athletically. Thank you for the quotes, for the lessons, for standing on deck in the rain and wind and below-freezing temperatures. You sincerely care about each member of this team, and have devoted immeasurable energy forming Orinda Aquatics into a positive, supportive community. Ronnie, your mentorship and support have helped open doors for me I never dreamt possible. Donnie, your guidance has challenged me not only to become a stronger athlete, but a more effective and compassionate teammate and person. Thank you to my team mates, your work ethic and passions for swimming are inspiring; your friendship and camaraderie, incredible.

And finally, Mom & Dad, your support and love has encouraged me to follow my passions and accomplish all that I have. I am blessed to have you guys. Thanks OA for the times and memories. I'll miss everyone next year. Best, Clay Sanders

Caitlin Hamilton, UC Davis



After a very frustrating high school season my sophomore year where I wasn't seeing any improvement in my times despite all of my efforts, I was motivated to switch to a year-round team. I started by doing a trial at a USS team near my house once high school season was over. Although I had several friends from school who were already on this team, something about it didn't feel right to me. After about two weeks, I came home from practice one night very upset because I thought I would never find a team where I would be happy. I had swam with the same rec team for nine years and had an extremely close bond with my high school team; these teams were my family. I began to think that maybe this was just how USS swimming was, that these teams put all their energy into training and let the fun experiences and family-like relationships slip by in the process. When I expressed my concern to my high school coach, she suggested I try out Orinda Aquatics.

I still remember my very first day at Orinda Aquatics. I have honestly never seen a whole team of kids that looked so happy to be at swim practice. Donnie told me about the kids on the team. Some had been on the team for just a short few months, while others had been swimming there for years. Some lived in Moraga, while others lived out in Berkeley or Alamo. I was shocked when I heard this, because I would have guessed that they had all known each other since their early swimming days as 6 and unders on rec teams by the way they were interacting.

After being on the team, I can now understand this. I have only been swimming on the team for a little over two years, but I feel like I have known so many of my teammates for my whole life. OA completely disproved my worries about USS teams, and I found my next swimming family here. Every single one of the swimmers on this team is an amazing person. They are so kind and caring toward one another, welcoming each and every new swimmer into the "family". They show a sense of responsibility and leadership that is unparalleled on any other team. I've never heard of another team who sets up the whole pool without being asked or doesn't need chaperones on travel trips. But what is most amazing to me is how humble everyone is. On every other team, you can tell who the fastest swimmers are, because they have the ego to match their speed. But on OA, the swimmers' humility makes it so you cannot tell the difference in attitude between a junior national qualifier and a JO qualifier, or who has a ridiculously high GPA. All of the swimmers on this team are what made it so amazing for me. You are all extraordinary people, and I am honored to consider you my friends.

Then there are the coaches. Donnie, Ronnie, and Dave are without a doubt the most well-rounded and inspirational people I know. Not only are they are coaches, they are our role models and our friends. They are unlike any other coaches. I see the difference when my friends on other USS teams come home from practice crying because of something their coach did. But on OA, we go to our coaches when we need advice, are upset, or have a problem. Thank you Ronnie, Donnie, and Dave for everything you have done for me. You make us laugh, support us, sacrifice your time, and teach us not only in swimming but in life. You taught me countless life lessons and made me realize that swimming isn't really about the times, but enjoying the sport and the wonderful relationships you gain through it. Thank you so much for showing me how to enjoy the process and that it really is your journey in life that matters in the end. To everyone: thank you for making my OA experience incredible. I will miss you all so much! Sincerely, Caitlin Hamilton

Sloan Caldwell, Claremont McKenna



To the Orinda Aquatics Family,

I have been swimming since I was five years old. I joined OA simply because in my freshman year I had experienced some success with swimming and I thought that three years of a varsity sport would look good on my college applications. I never dreamed that the team would have the effect on me that it did or that swimming would become such a huge part of my life, and not because of improvements in my times but because of a change in my mentality and character.

Throughout my time on OA I have had both success and setbacks, both in my personal life and my swimming career, but throughout it all I knew that I could count on my team to lift me up. The effect this team has had on me cannot be fully expressed in this letter, and even I cannot really understand how I grew from the scared girl who joined a team where she knew absolutely no one, simply to improve her times and make varsity, to the person I am today; a person that thinks of the team as family and will go on to swim in college next fall. When I joined the team I never dreamed I would turn into that person. In fact, every time Ronnie and Donnie told us at the Friday meetings that over ninety percent of Orinda Aquatics swimmers go onto swim in college, I thought "well that won't be me, I'm not fast enough". But now I will be attending the college of my dreams in the fall and I have relationships built through this team that will last far into my college career, and it was all made possible by this team and this sport.

The bottom line is this team has changed me. Through all the articles, morning practices, competitions, socials (and long sets with the turn master), I have become a different person. I don't know what kind of person I would be without this team and I don't want to know. This team has shown me how to rise above. I can now go confidently into my future with the knowledge that nothing can break me. I have cried, I have laughed, I have smiled, and I have suffered, all for and with this team. You all are my second family. So, from the bottom of my heart, I thank you, coaches, team-mates, and my parents, for everything you have done for me. I thank you for suffering through every cold morning practice in December, for drying my tears after every disappointing race, for laughing at every inside joke, and for every article, set, and speech. I would truly be a lesser person without all of you.

Love, Sloan Caldwell

Jeffrey Strausser, Brown University



Callie Roberts, Duke University





OA Team Photo 2008



Thank you!!!! We wish you the very best.