

Email from Eric Tang, OA & Campo swimmer '06, Columbia University

Hey Ron and Don,

I just wanted to check in with you guys about my last season at Columbia University.

On May 16, I'll be graduating with a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering with a pre-medical concentration, which I'm told are the most difficult major and concentration respectively. Over the past 4 years I've accumulated 155 credits, 25 more than I need to graduate. I've also seen grown men and women breakdown and cry during exams. What does a chemical engineer study? Some of my classes include Fluid Dynamics, Heat Transfer, Thermodynamics, Reaction Kinetics, etc. Luckily, I have pre-med/bio classes to boost my GPA. In four years excluding the two weeks I was near dead with mono, I had a 100% practice attendance, so if you guys have any high schoolers who complain how difficult their schoolwork is, just tell them about me.

Anyway, during an interview a couple weeks ago, I was asked: "Swimming is often thought as an individual sport. How is it in any way a team sport?" Swimming, contrary to common belief, is anything but an individual sport. In fact, I would like to be bold enough to say that **swimming is far more of team sport** than those like basketball, soccer, or football. In these sports, you're forced to play with other people. It's part of the rules, part of the game. Swimming is different. In swimming, you are a given choice. On one hand, you can be that individual who trains and competes just for personal goals only. The person who is more concerned of what he or she wants rather than what the team needs. On the other hand, **you can be that athlete who acts in the best interest of his or her teammates - the person who is willing to sacrifice anything to help bring the team closer to its goal.**

You don't wake up at 6 AM six times a week because you simply enjoy swimming. You don't put yourself through 20+ hours of training, 20+ grueling hours hell on a weekly basis just because you personally want to be a better athlete. You do it for the 30 or so other members of the team who also trained just as hard, not because they wanted to be an Olympian or a NCAA champion or even a NCAA qualifier, but because they too wanted the team to excel and win.

Every time I strapped on my goggles and stepped onto the blocks to race, everything was always as clear as day, everything made perfect sense. Each race, I was prepared to swim my heart out every single yard, every single second. No matter how tired I felt, how hurt I was, I was ready to rip myself to pieces before letting another swimmer from an opposing team defeat me. If I gave anything less, I would be disrespecting my coach, my teammates, and this school. This was my responsibility to my team and I knew the other guys on the team shared that same weight. This is one thing I'll miss about swimming: everyone on the team seeing things the same way.

This especially applies to a team like ours, in which most of us will never be a part of the sport's elite. Only a couple of us have NCAA B cuts (barely), a handful with national cuts. However, characterized by our 12 meet season, our relatively small physical size, and our refusal to rest or shave for anything besides Ivies, Columbia's Men's Swim and Dive Team has established itself over the years as not only the scrappiest and least talented, but also the toughest and craziest group of guys that ever competed in the Ivy League...Standing at 5'7", I can confidently say I am the scrappiest, the least-talented, and the craziest of them all.

Four practices into my final season I was diagnosed with mononucleosis, which was quite the pain. After my more severe symptoms died down after a couple weeks, I went against medical advice and decided go back training full-time because I knew that, even at my current state, I could still put up some points in dual meets. This marked the beginning of the three most painful months of my life. The first 6 dual meets were not pretty. After each race, my muscles would

cramp up, I would get light-headed, and my vision would go blurry. It wasn't a good feeling. I swam horrendously, going 59s in the 100 br, 2:10s-2:14s in the 200, getting killed by guys I was supposed to beat.

The first half of the season had taken a toll on my body, but my poor performances only made me more fired up. It made me hungry. There were 6 more meets left in the season, and I wanted to prove to myself, to my teammates and the whole league, that I still had some fight left in me. I got a nice little rest over winter break and soon what appeared to be the worst season of my life rapidly transformed into the best. As a second semester senior, I literally swam like there was no tomorrow. In the last 5 dual meets, I put up times that I never knew I was capable doing unrested/unshaven going 58.1, 57.8, 57.6, 57.6, 57.0 in the 100s and 2:07s, 2:06, and 2:05s in the 200s.

At the Ivy League Championships in March, and racing at Denunzio Pool at Princeton as usual, was quite the experience. Every single row of the complex was packed with parents and students. During each final swim, it got so loud that I could feel the blocks shake. As a team, we swam out of our minds. Our team, the same team that was projected to get 6th or 7th, roared back from a 150-point deficit to sneak past a much more talented Penn team for a 3rd place. No one in the league was expecting such a finish. No one except us. Princeton and Harvard were in a league of their own, so a 3rd place finish was quite the honor. I attribute most of our success not to a good taper, but to our support for each other. I had never felt so proud as a member of this team than when I was standing on the podium with my teammates accepting that little trophy.

Individually, I swam well, going 56.09 in the 100 and 2:02.2 in the 200. These were a little bit faster than my times last year, but most of the people were adding anywhere between 2-5 seconds in each event. I made the top 8 finals for the first time, getting 6th and 7th in the 100 and 200 respectively. I also swam the breast leg on the 200 and 400 medley relays for the first time since I was 12 years old. Our relay placed 2nd in both events, garnering 2nd-Team All-Ivy Honors and getting NCAA B cuts. It was nice way to end **my 15-year swimming career**. I was later selected to the 2010 Academic All-Ivy Team for winter sports. The top 5 male and female athletes with over a 3.0 GPA were chosen from each Ivy-League school for their academic and athletic achievements. The other fellow members from Columbia included a runner who was an Ivy League champion and record holder, a fellow swimmer, an All-American academic basketball player, and an All- Ivy League fencer. I felt honored to be recognized among the Ivy League's elite. Anyway, I'll be back in the bay post-graduation. Starting August, I will be working for Dr. Jeff Fineman for a year at UCSF Medical School doing some research in pulmonary hypertension. I plan on going to medical school in Fall 2011.

I wish OA and your respective high school team's good luck.

-Eric "E-Tang" Tang

*PS: I ran some rough calculations concerning the mileage I've put on my body over my lifetime. In 21 years, I have approximately swum 15.3 million yards, which comes out to be 8,600 miles. To put that in perspective, the distance between San Francisco and New York City is about 3000 miles. **I have also spent 7,300 hours training, which is equivalent to 304 days. Do I ever wish I could have those days back? The answer is No.***