

Just As Expected.

A realization. That was what it was, that dropped my spirits considerably. A realization that I had not succeeded, on the last day of the swimming Championships. Just two weeks prior, I had been coughing my lungs out. For those two weeks, I had used my sickness as an excuse to not train as hard. And now, at my championship meet, I felt it. There was no arguing in my favor: I had gone slower than my best by multiple seconds, even though I should have improved. I had failed at what was supposed to be the last hurrah of my season. This failure practically tore out my heart. I thought that I would never be as good as I had been. I lost all faith in my ability to do anything, even outside of swimming.

Afterwards, the notion of failure put me down greatly. Just the realization that I hadn't done what I could have done to recover was disparaging. I could have forced myself to swim on harder intervals, could have done more weight training. I told my coach that I was feeling weak, instead of hopping right back in to the harder training. I scratched race events, instead of swimming to recover. To me, it was the end of my swimming years. I was never fast in the first place. My lack of height and muscles never got me anywhere, so it was time to quit anyways. But then, after I had fallen to rock bottom, I realized that actually, this situation was the perfect opportunity to me to train harder than ever. Because from it, I learned that after a setback, the goal is not to recover slowly, but to surprise everyone with the strength of my recovery, in this case from my illness. The regret I had eventually gave way to a new sense of motivation to work.

Why? Because I was never going to endure another barrage of insulting words, regarding all the things that I could have done. My failure at clawing myself back to prime condition motivated me—I never again put myself in a slow lane. I tried my hardest to make every

interval, no matter what. I consistently made all of the intervals, sometimes being the only one on the team to do so. Other people's expectations of me were huge. Growing up in an Asian household, I was expected to be good at everything. Similarly, expectations of me were high on my high school swimming team, because I swam year-round and we had won two consecutive Conference titles.

However, I learned that the goal of any recovery is not to match others' expectations. My coach had told me after my race that the result was what he expected. Had I matched his low expectations of me, it would have been a failure. Rather, the goal was to exceed expectations, stage a comeback that should not have happened. I was expected to fail and that was exactly what happened. My own expectations were the same. However, had I exceeded them, it would have meant a best time. That would have been considered a success, under all of the pressure that I took pride in living up to. In any situation, my goal is always to succeed despite any setbacks.

I apply that principle to all situations, whether the setback is physical, mental, or anything else. How this swimming failure affected me, and what I learned from it, changed the way I battled setbacks afterwards.

Weeks later, I got another illness during the Knowledge Bowl State Championships. I was experiencing vomiting and extreme dizziness. As far as my coach was concerned, that was it. I didn't listen. I chose instead to trust my skills. I still studied my questions. I worked as hard as I could, and with huge effort, I led my team to our second consecutive State title.