

My Michigan Hero

Alexis Okete

“I hated every minute of training, but I said, ‘Don’t quit.’ Suffer now and live the rest of your life as a champion.”-Muhammad Ali

This is what my coach would say if I'm getting tired and stopping at swim practice. Coach Kyle is not just a coach; he's a friend, a husband, a dad. Unlike the other coaches, there was something special about him. Maybe because he was a swimmer just like me, but he never went hard on me like the rest of the coaches are. He's just calm and keeps encouraging me to keep going. When I get a good time for one of my 50-meter races, he congratulates me, and he always gives me advice to do better and to never quit.

One day when I was 12, I was at a swim meet, and I was trying to make time in a 50-meters freestyle in regionals. The time to make was 32.99 seconds or under. My current time was 33.45 seconds. Coach Kyle taught me important skills to go fast in this race, so I was ready. Once I got to my assigned block, Coach Kyle came up to me and told me, “Don't quit. If you get tired, keep going until you make it.” I kept what he said to me inside my heart, and if he believes in me, I believe in myself too.

Once I heard the official say “swimmers step up on the blocks,” I was starting to doubt myself, but when I looked at Coach Kyle, he gave me a thumbs up, so now I was determined to make that time. “Take your marks, beep” is all I heard next. I pierced like an arrow through the water at the speed of light. I swam like I never had before. Once I got to the end of the pool, I flipped so hard that I didn't even know I flipped. When I took a breath of air, I saw the leader board, and it was at 29 seconds. I had three seconds left to make it to the wall. So, with all my power I had left in me, I pushed myself as hard as I could to the wall, and I slammed my hands on the wall pad. “This is it” I say in my head. “This is the moment you've been waiting for, let's see that leaderboard!” I turned my head; heart beating fast. I saw my time. 32.98. I made regionals by 0.2 seconds. Once I got out of the pool, I ran up to Coach Kyle, and he gave me the biggest hug ever, and he told me that he believed that I could do it, and I did it.

In conclusion, you don't have to be the best of the best. You just have to believe in yourself, even if no one else believes in you. That's why Coach Kyle is my Michigan Hero.