

National Diversity Select Camp Experience

Attending the USA Swimming National Diversity Select Camp was not only an amazing swim experience, but it paved a path for me to learn how to be a leader and a role-model for under-represented communities like mine. At the camp, I was able to swim with a diverse group of swimmers from multicultural backgrounds whom I hope will become lifelong friends of mine. The select camp was an awesome opportunity to see, practice, and race with groups of people that were far more diverse than I was used to. I finally got a chance to swim surrounded by swimmers who looked like me. To train at such a stunning and elite facility like the Colorado Olympic and Paralympic Training Center, was a phenomenal bonus.

Another honor was the remarkable coaching and managing staff. Coaches, Clayton Cagle, Crystal Keelan, Melissa Wilborn, Tommy Jackson, Evan Moline, Sydney Pepper, and Sean Sullivan were such spectacular coaches. They gave constant and direct feedback, led by example, and were passionate about the sport. Moving on to the educational perspective of the camp, I was able to attend lectures and classes about anti-doping, courtesy of a USADA agent, safe sport guidelines and rules, understanding unconscious bias and how to combat it, nutrition and its impact on a swimmer's body, and much more. We learned controllables and uncontrollables and how we should work to create opportunities to control parts of an uncontrollable situation. For example, practicing in your own home pool during COVID or bringing extra tech suits to meets to counter tech suit rips.

I strongly encourage Connecticut to continue to send swimmers to the camp for several reasons. For instance, at the camp, we learned from and conversed with decorated Olympians like Ryan Murphy and Maritza Correia. We were able to gain an understanding of the barriers Correia broke to not just become the first Puerto Rican of African descent to be a member of the USA Olympic swimming team, but also to become the first Puerto Rican of African descent to be a member of the USA Olympic swimming team and medal. We recognized the grit and resilience she possessed and how we would need to do the same in our lives if we hoped to break barriers as well.

Coach Melissa and Olympian Maritza Correria especially inspired me, because like me, they were both sprinters and excelled in the same events that I strive to. Additionally, connecting back to what I discussed earlier, I was able to create new friendships and form bonds with a majority of the 52-56 swimmers across the nation who attended. These relationships allowed me to grasp a bit of what life is like in different communities nationwide, from swimmers in sunny Hawaii to frosty Wisconsin. Connections through swimming and culture sparked between us and made the camp a truly life-changing and memorable experience. I was proud to represent USA Swimming, CPAC, and Connecticut at the National Diversity Select camp. Thank you to all who made this possible!

-Annam Olasewere