

A senior at Austin High School, swimmer Simone Manuel represents Team USA and her hometown of Sugar Land at competitions around the world

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- Simone Manuel

Finding Her Place in the WATER

Sugar Land swimmer Simone Manuel breaks Olympian's record, represents Team USA

Written by Taryn Burnett | Select photography courtesy of Sharron Manuel

For Team USA swimmer and Sugar Land resident Simone Manuel, there's always been a love for water, but at age 10 she almost gave up swimming to pursue dance instead. Fortunately, her mother Sharron suggested she stick with both ballet and swimming. A year later, Simone decided to put her full focus on swimming. It's a good thing too, because it turns out that Simone is quite the competitor.

Diving Right In

Head coach Allison Beebe at First Colony Swim Team attributes part of Simone's competitiveness to being the family's youngest child. "She's always genuinely loved to race, and she hasn't lost this passion as she's gotten older," says Beebe, who has coached Simone since she was 11 years old.

A well-rounded athlete, Simone enjoys time with her friends and brings a lot of energy to the pool, according to Beebe, who has seen Simone beat Missy Franklin's 16-and-under 50-meter freestyle record and become the fastest U.S. women's 50-meter freestyler in 2013. Simone credits Beebe with showing her how to "enjoy the process." "The first step to competing at a high level is to love the sport you compete in," says Simone. "If you love the sport you choose, you will reach your full potential because you enjoy it." She also credits her family, community, and school support systems with helping her succeed while pursuing her passion to swim.

Getting Her Feet Wet

Though Simone might not remember her first victory, her mother vividly recalls some of her daughter's first experiences around water. "I remember taking her to Water World when she wasn't even a year old," says Sharron. "The second we put her in the water, she splashed and splashed and splashed. It was like a transformation."

That transformation continued a couple years later when Simone was 4 years old and eager to change from watching her brothers, Christopher and Ryan, compete in meets to competing in meets of her own. Her parents enrolled her in swim lessons at the Houston Swim Club with the plan that a year later, Simone could join the swim team. On the second day of swim lessons, Simone swam across the pool.

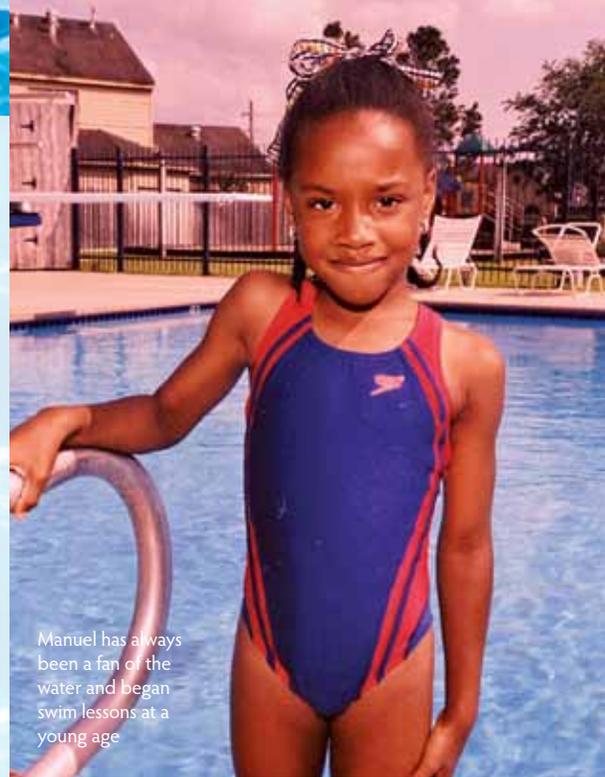
Sharron says, "At that moment, I said, 'Oh boy, was I wrong. She can swim!'" Simone went on to do six weeks of lessons, and hasn't stopped swimming since - going from the recreational league, to Sienna Plantation Aquatics for two years, before joining First Colony.

No Limitations

For Simone, the victory she most remembers wasn't her first, but instead one when she was 12 at a Zones Championship Meet. She was disappointed in her showing at Zones the year before and set a goal to have a better performance the second time around. Not only did she improve her performance, she broke two State of Texas records.

When she travels to Stanford University this fall as a freshman, her no-limits perspective is sure to propel her toward even more victories. According to Simone, "The end result to your success is more rewarding when you can reflect on the journey and the way you got there." **SLM**

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Manuel has always been a fan of the water and began swim lessons at a young age



Manuel (center) along with fellow First Colony Swim Team athletes, Delaney Quattlebaum and Kaitlyn Swinney, committed to collegiate swimming



Manuel at the 2013 Phillips 66 National Championships in Indianapolis

Photo by Mike Comer/ProSwim.com