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ALEXANDER'S MOHAMMED TURNS HYDROPHOBIA INTO SWIMMING SUCCESS

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Overcoming hydrophobia

Alexander swimmer continues record-breaking career

By CLARA SANDOVAL
LAREDO MORNING TIMES

When sophomore Alexander swimmer Ayeesha Mohammed was in elementary school, she had hydrophobia, a fear of water. She was even terrified of water touching her face.

Mohammed would in no way be found around a swimming pool and it took her eight years before she would even consider taking a dip.

"I started swimming so I could get over a water phobia," Mohammed said with a laugh. "I did not like to swim and did not like the water. I could not put my head under water."

Fast forward to 2014 and Mohammed is considered one of the best swimmers in Laredo having qualified for the UIL state swim and diving meet two years in a row and earning All-State honors last year as a freshman.

"Making it to state two years in a row has been quite a blessing," Mohammed said. "I am fortunate to be in this position and have worked hard all season long."

Mohammed will be swimming on Friday at the Class 5A state meet at the Lee & Joe Jamail Texas Swim Center on the ground at University of Texas. She will compete in the 200-yard Individual Medley and the 100-yard butterfly where she is seated eighth in both events.

"Ayeesha is ready to represent Alexander, UISD and the Laredo community at the state meet," UISD swim coach Paul Kane said. "She has been a great asset to the program and has started to put Laredo on the map."

Mohammed set the local swimming scene on fire as a freshman breaking six UISD swim records.

She holds the record in the 200-yard Individual Medley (2:18.11), 100-yard Butterfly (57.92), 100-yard freestyle (55.31), 100-yard backstroke (1:00.63) and anchored the 400-yard freestyle relay (3:50) and the 200-yard medley relay (1:56.76).

This year she added a new record to her many accomplishments, breaking the 50-yard freestyle at the CCISD class meet on Oct. 19.

"Last year was fun and interesting because no one knew about me at the district meet," Mohammed said. "I surprised everybody by getting the 29-5A district record in the 100-butterfly. Heading into regionals, a lot of people started wondering about me but my training was able to get me through. I am an experienced swimmer and have been swimming in big competitions for some time."

Last year she took the district and regional titles in the 100-yard butterfly, 100-yard backstroke and anchored the 400-yard freestyle relay that made a trip to state.

This year Mohammed did not skip a beat and has continued to dominate the local scene. She is regarded as one of the best swimmers in South Texas having qualified for zone championships later on this year.

The first strokes Mohammed's father Abdul was a swim coach who formed his own swimming club, Laredo Nadadores, in 2006. He was also the head swim coach of the Laredo Tritons even before Ayeesha was born. He was finally able to convince her to get into the swimming pool.

"It took her several months to submerge her face into the water. Months later she was floating



Photo by Danny Zaragoza | Laredo Morning Times



and taking rudimentary strokes," Abdul said. "It took me a long time to help her get comfortable with water. I wanted her to be safe around water and enjoy being in the swimming pool."

Abdul was a college swimmer in his native India where he attended Osmania University and majored in electrical engineering.

"I played cricket and swam at the university for a year. The academics and athletics were overwhelming and I had to quit sports to concentrate on school," Abdul said. "I was not the star of the teams but was pretty decent and did my best. Ayeesha is able to do successfully what I couldn't, excel in both academics and athletics."

With the support of her father, Mohammed set out to finally get into the swimming pool and only took baby steps, not putting her head under water the first time that she got into a swimming pool. When she finally was able to feel comfortable enough to put her head under the water, she started to do a few strokes before she had to hang on to the side of the pool.

It was several more months be-

fore she was able to swim her first 25 yards, the length of the pool, without holding to any on to anything.

"I remember when I did my first 25, swam the whole length without stopping, I was elated," Mohammed said. "It was a Saturday and I remember that practice. I was so happy and decided to continue.

"I felt if I could do something like that, I could definitely move forward in swimming. It became really fun for me."

Mohammed did move forward and started to pick up a slew of medals and accolades before arriving at Alexander last year.

"Never did I imagine that she would take up competitive swimming and be good at it," Abdul said. "Once she started practicing and competing, her talent started to surface."

By the age of 10, Mohammed qualified to compete at the Texas Age Group State Championships in Dallas, her first state meet where she swam butterfly and backstroke. Also that year she attained her first "AAAA" time in 100-yard butterfly at the state meet in Lee & Joe Jamail Texas Swim Center in Austin. It is the

highest USA Swimming time standard a swimmer can achieve at that age.

In her first meet at the age of 8, Mohammed placed fourth in the 100-breast stroke at New Braunfels.

"I really started to enjoy our swim meets more than practices," Mohammed said. "I then started to get serious about the sport and wanted to go faster."

Mohammed has never looked back since, qualifying for and attending state meets every year.

"I am very proud of Ayeesha as a coach and father. She is a fast learner, dedicated, and works very hard," he said. "She is a good role model for others on the team and is always motivating and helping others at practices. She has overcome adversity and challenges to be in swimming and practice her sport that she loves so much.

"She has always maintained that her accomplishments are a template for others to follow and be even more successful. I started coaching eight years ago, even before Ayeesha took up swimming. It has been my goal, since to develop high quality swimmers in our community."

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