

Hostage Has Leadership Role

by Maiah Hollande, Pac-10.org

It takes nerve to voluntarily free fall from 30 feet in the air into a pool of water below, but for Stanford diver Meg Hostage that's just part of an average day.

Hailing from Potomac, Md., Hostage is the oldest member and captain of the Stanford women's dive team. She has overcome physical injury and has become a cornerstone for the unity of both the men and women's squads.

But she wasn't always been a leader in her life.

As a young girl, Hostage says she was more interested in following her brother into baseball and football, wanting "to do whatever he did." In middle school Hostage made the switch to gymnastics, following many of her friends into the sport.

While she enjoyed many aspects of gymnastics, there was one deal breaker that would affect her decision to keep with it.

"I did [gymnastics] for a few years," said Hostage. "I decided that the time commitment for gymnastics was just too much."

Luckily for her there was an alternative in diving that gave her the best of both worlds.

Hostage went to a summer program at her local pool for six weeks, trying out swimming as her new sport. But after practice was over, Hostage went over to the dive wall and was hooked.

This new opportunity allowed Hostage to use the acrobatic skills she learned in gymnastics and apply them to something she loved in diving. From there, Hostage became involved with the Montgomery Dive Club, through coach John Wolsh who would be her coach in the years to come.

"I went through the junior team and the traveling team," said Hostage. "I was fortunate to have access to such a good team right near my house."

The fit was perfect for Hostage, and her diving career took off quickly, even in the summer of her first year.

In fact it was that fateful summer that helped lead her to her future college team. Hostage was competing at nationals, which coincidentally were held at Stanford that year.

"That was the first exposure I had," said Hostage. "It was at that point I decided that I wanted to go to school at Stanford. It was just so pretty and there were palm trees, and it was just paradise."

Fortunately for Hostage, Stanford head diving coach Rick Schavone felt that she deserved to be a part of that paradise and contacted Hostage, asking her to consider applying to Stanford and join the team.

"It was Thanksgiving and I remember we were all sitting watching TV and I was on my computer," Hostage said. "That was when I got the email, and I was so excited and yelling."

Stanford was her first choice, but Hostage had to be sure to visit back-up schools in case things didn't work out.

"I didn't know if I would get in," said Hostage. "I was sort of forced to look at other schools."

Once Stanford accepted her, however, Hostage never looked back at what might have been. She immediately integrated into the dive program and found a second family in the team.

"They were amazing," she said. "My team freshman year when I came in was awesome. I loved all of them and I miss them a lot."

The warm welcome and helping hands from veteran divers made Hostage's transition seamless and she was able to focus on contributing to the team in her dives.

As a freshman, Hostage became Stanford's first freshman diver to ever earn Pac-10 Diver of the Year accolades. She was also named the Pac-10's Diving Newcomer of the Year after taking the conference title in the 3-meter competition. Her success seemed to be unstoppable, but an injury that same year would place a serious restriction on her accomplishments. During NCAA competition, Hostage bent down to stretch before a dive and her back was so stiff she couldn't touch her toes.

"We were trying to figure out what was going on," said Hostage. "It had never given me much trouble before."

What had seemed like a minor tension issue turned out to be a protruding disc in her spine. Thankfully the injury wasn't pinching any nerves, but it still posed a danger to Hostage's diving career.

After a lot of physical therapy, working out in the gym for an hour a day, Hostage was able to make the comeback to diving with more gusto than ever. As a sophomore, Hostage was the top finisher in the 1-meter springboard for Stanford, and as a junior reached the NCAAs for the third-straight year.

Her determination and passion for the sport not only helped her persevere over her injury, but also cemented her role as a leader for the team.

“I think that leading by example is the best way to do it,” said Hostage. “The biggest thing about being a captain is when you’re having a bad practice, that you sort of have to look past that and train through it for the benefit of the team.”

This philosophy would help Hostage garner new friends in her team of 14 freshman, and even build strong bonds with the men’s dive team.

“We all travel together,” said Hostage. “It’s like we’re all just one big team.”

In competition the men and women’s scores go to each individual team, she said, but they all just view themselves one team supporting one another.

“I remember Pac-10 my freshman year,” said Hostage. “There were I think six girls and four boys, and we spent so much time together at the pool and at the hotel, I just remember that being the best team bonding maybe I’ve had in my four years.”

Now in her final year of college, Hostage has had to look to the future and what plans she wants to pursue.

“If you had asked me a year ago ‘Will you continue diving after your season is over?’ I would have said no,” she said. “But strangely, as I’ve gotten closer and closer to actually being done and not being an athlete anymore, it’s making me want to continue diving.”

And when Hostage dreams about her future in diving, she dreams big.

“I wasn’t able to attend the Olympic trials my freshman year because of my back injury,” she said. “It’s sort of always been something that I’ve thought about continuing to try for, but I don’t know. We’ll see.”