

MAKING WAVES *and history, too.*



BY BENJAMIN YEARGIN

Quinnipiac University Student
School of Communications
December 15, 2022



*"It's been really amazing," Roberts said.
"Everyone here is just so encouraging and supportive."*

Ciara Roberts

The sound of waves from girls swimming in the Flood Middle School pool in Stratford is something senior Ciara Roberts heard much of her life.

From Roberts's older sister, Ceili, swimming on the Stratford swim team to their mother, Laura, coaching at Stratford High, Roberts has been on that pool deck and in the water since she was a little kid.



"I first started swimming competitively in first grade," Roberts said. "I was always in the Mommy and Me classes and I kind of just grew up around the water."

Swimming is a major part of Roberts' life, helping to mold her into the person she is today and allowing her to confront life's challenges head on.

Being the coach's daughter, you'd think Roberts would get special treatment. That couldn't be farther from the truth.



Since no one else wanted to swim the grueling 500-yard freestyle, Laura made her daughter do it. But doing the 500-yard freestyle over and over made Roberts into the strong swimmer she is.

"The worst event is the 500 free," the coach said. "I had no one to put in the 500 free except for my own kids ... (Roberts) did it and did it well. And, she was proud of what she accomplished."

As much as the sport of swimming has shaped Roberts, the Stratford swim team has provided her support.

"It's been really amazing," Roberts said. "Everyone here is just so encouraging and supportive. If I swim a race and I come out upset with my time, they're always encouraging me."



Some of the encouragement from being on the swim team comes from her best friend, senior swimmer Natalie Lizotte.

"She's (Roberts) is one of those people that you could just go in, come out of a bad race and she's right there," Lizotte said.



Despite the camaraderie, the Stratford swim team has historically not performed well. This year is the first time in five years that the team has won a meet.

In fact, they've won three - against Masuk, New Fairfield and Bunnell on the team's senior night.

However, the team will have 10 graduating seniors, including Roberts.

The 10 graduating seniors were all honored on Tuesday, Oct. 25 when the team faced Bunnell at Flood.

Though the meet was technically away, it felt like a home meet for the Stratford Red Devils.

The bleachers of Flood Pool in Stratford, were divided into a small, blue section for Bunnell, then the longer, larger bleachers were filled with Red.

Besides being senior day for the Red Devils, this meet held a more significant meaning, too.



In the 48-year history of Stratford girls swimming, the Red Devils had never beaten Bunnell.

Starting with the second event of the meet, the 200-yard freestyle, Stratford came out and won handily with Roberts finishing fourth.

Though the cross-town rivalry is something that the athletes on both sides can't ignore, there is sportsmanship in the pool. Swimmers on both teams high fived each other at the end of every event, uplifting each other no matter what happened before.

Then there was the infamous 500-yard freestyle.

Stratford got out to an early lead against the Bulldogs, but as each lap crept up, the Red Devil lead got shorter and shorter. By laps nine, 10 and 11, Stratford and Bunnell were neck-and-neck. But as the race went on, Stratford ended up winning the event. Roberts hustled her way to a third place finish and ended up with a solid time of 6:01:24.

Roberts and her coach felt that Roberts didn't perform her best because of factors out of their control.

"She didn't do her very best, but she also wasn't pushed by the other team," Laura Roberts said.

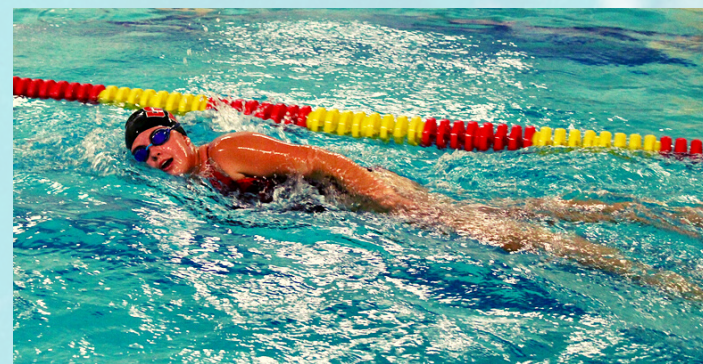
The 200-yard freestyle was Roberts's best of the day as the team gave her the lead and she closed the event swiftly. She was last in her leg and ended up winning the event for Stratford.

Finally, the last event of the meet was the 400-yard relay, which Roberts competed in with Lizotte.

They ended up finishing second, only getting beaten by another Red Devils team.

When it was time to announce the final score, history was officially made. The Stratford Red Devils won its third meet of the year - and its first over Bunnell in program history.

However, the meet festivities were far from over as the four Bunnell seniors and 10 Stratford seniors still had to give their senior speeches and swim their last lap.



When it came time for Roberts's speech, the only freshman on the team, Mary-Grace Sutton, delivered it to her. She called Roberts the "perfect role model" and praised her as a person and as a teammate.

Roberts swam her last lap as a Red Devil, but she has plans to keep swimming at Western Connecticut State University in Danbury, Connecticut.

