Skeleton:

1. you're in the present getting ready for your tournament.
2. and then flashback about your swimming journey.
3. How you started feeling out of love.
4. and then how you struggled and decided to stay in the team.
5. What you learned about responsibility & ownership; and how you think that your swim team is greater than you are; more important than you as an individual.
6. ending -- how you say yes, ready as i'll ever be.

**Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you’ve already written, one that response to a different prompt, or one of your own design.**

A whistle is blown in the distance. Silence. A few seconds later, the aggressive sound of splashing, accompanied by deafening cheers and claps. This sequence of sounds was something I’d grown all too familiar with.

Swimming had been an ever-present aspect in my life. At the age of seven, I signed up to compete in numerous neighborhood competitions. I continued to participate in inter-school competitions throughout primary school, all the while constantly working to reduce my time. In middle and high school, I became a member of the school swimming team, where I trained tirelessly. I always came home beat, ready to pass out on the nearest soft surface. Nevertheless, I loved every second of my time spent in the pool – from the exhilaration of a sprint to the games played with the team after training sessions, and especially the thrill that came when I broke my personal records.

“38 seconds! Now that’s more like it!” hollered one of my coaches, as I tried to catch my breath at the pool end. I was certainly glad, but I didn’t feel the same elation as I felt when I went from 45 seconds to 43, then to 40.

In ninth grade, I had begun to sense a personal air of malaise whenever I came to the pool to train. I didn’t know why. Perhaps I just hadn’t been getting enough sleep? Or maybe schoolwork was getting to me? I wasn’t the only one lacking sleep or struggling with schoolwork though, and everyone else still seemed like they were having fun. But there was no mistaking it. I was growing bored and dull. Training sessions felt mundane and monotonous, which was heartbreaking; losing interest in a passion never feels good.

I entertained the idea of leaving the swimming team. Every time I went to the pool or had a conversation about the team, it was as if I was experiencing an angel vs. devil dilemma – the free spirit battling the interdependent persona. The former kept whispering in my ear, “Why continue if you’re no longer passionate? It’s a waste of time!” The latter retorted, “Think of the bigger picture! What about your parents, your coaches and your teammates?”

On one hand, there was really no point in staying in the team if it no longer brought me joy. I could invest my time and effort doing something I loved. But my life isn’t only about me, me, me. I thought about my kinfolk. My parents, who had been there since the very beginning; funded my lessons, and witnessed my progress from a playful little swimmer to a competitive athlete. My coaches, who saw my potential and constantly pushed me to improve. My teammates, with whom I’ve shared a genuine camaraderie with as the years passed. I wanted to make them proud and happy.

I decided to stay. I saw this as a sacrifice at first – after all, I was prioritizing collective success over my own interests. However, the longer I stayed, the more I realized something critical; even though it’s important to follow what my heart desires, sometimes, responsibilities and commitments must come first. We needed to consistently perform strongly and positively as a team; it’s not just about earning individual achievements, but it’s also about making a good name for our school. Swimming became bigger than me as an individual, and I had a responsibility to fulfill as a daughter, a student, an athlete, and a team member. It was crucial for them to know that they could depend on me to deliver the best for the team, and I was determined to thrive for them.

“Girls in the mixed relay category ages thirteen to fourteen should go to the designated waiting area now. You guys ready?” my coach asked, snapping me back to reality. I looked at my fellow teammates and smiled, “Ready as I’ll ever be.”