

HENRY WEBB

Zoey Ueland | Staff Writer

The motivation that comes with a deep passion for swimming drove **Henry Webb '25** this past summer when, on the last night of Senior State finals (Aug. 1 2021), he and three of his teammates destroyed the national age group record in the 400 meter long course freestyle relay at the John K. Freeman Aquatic Center located at the U of M. Previously set at 3:37.47 in 2019, the record set by Webb and his teammates now stands at 3:36.01.

The 1.46 second drop is evidence of Webb's grit in and out of the pool. Webb has been swimming for 10 years after he started swimming during the summer in an effort to follow in his older brother's footsteps. His tenacity for swimming isn't about simple enjoyment; in fact, Webb explains that among swimmers, there is a shared hatred for the sport that manifests itself as a unique motivation that bonds teammates to work their hardest. He elaborates, "I really like that everyone just collectively hates the sport and we all acknowledge that the other people hate it and then push each other through it together."

In addition to swimming for Bearstangs (Blake and Breck's co-op boys swim team), Webb practices on a co-ed all year club team called Aquajets. Founded to encourage swimmers to think and train like champions, Aquajets now owns a facility in Eden Prairie with three 25 yard pools. During the summer months, Aquajet swimmers also train long course at the Edina Community Pool before the sun rises.

Webb's teammate on both the Bearstangs and Aquajets, **Josiah March '24**, echoes Webb's sentiments that "Swimming is hard and we all understand that and it's kind of something we joke about. We're kind of joking but we're also serious too but yeah I definitely feel like that's there."

March adds that "[Webb] works really hard. He's always pushing me, [and] pushing other people in practice. I really appreciate him. I'm on his Bearstang and Aquajets team so I get to see it everyday." Another one of Webb's teammates on both the Bearstangs and

on Aquajets, **Cayden Liao '24**, adds that Webb is both "hardworking and lovable by the coaches."

The road to breaking the National Age group record wasn't easy; like everything else, it came with its challenges. Webb shares, "Probably our biggest challenge was COVID [be]cause they didn't have relays at most meets. It took us like four tries, and those were our first four relays together pretty much, so getting our relay figured out was a lot of the challenge and then getting a good opportunity to try it."

March concurs, "They tried to get that record like 5 or 6 times, Webb would anchor and every single time, he was so consistent he went 52.6, 52.7s...we're all kinda like wondering [what was going to happen] and then they just destroyed it. He had a great anchor leg, it was super fun to watch." The pressure and anticipation all boiled down to that one summer night; behind the blocks Webb was feeling the heat. He reflects on the build-up to the swim noting that behind the blocks it was unclear if the team was on pace. Webb notes, "[I] just got in and did what I could." When he looked up and saw his teammates celebrating, he knew they had achieved their goal.

Senior State occurs twice a year each year, once in the summer and once in the winter. Summer state takes place at the Jean K Freeman Aquatic Center, the pool at the University of Minnesota. The meet spans for 4 days and attracts swimmers from all over Minnesota if they meet the criteria of being 13 and older as well as achieving qualifying times any time prior in the season.

Webb will carry this accomplishment around with him for the rest of his life, including this upcoming boys high school swim season which takes place in the winter months. The differences between club and high school swimming are expansive. Webb adds, "High school is a much tighter team, and I'm much closer to every-

one on the team. But, recently club has been a lot of fun too, club is just much... they're much tougher on us at club and it's just most of my year whereas high school is much more lighthearted and fun." Liao echoes that while "both [Bearstangs and Aquajets] are fun to practice with," he agrees, "I do feel that the high school team...are more bonded with each other."

While many swimmers participate in high school and, for the extra training, go to an extra club practice or two, Webb won't be joining in. He notes, "Well a lot of people go in the mornings before school and do club and high school I don't think that I am going to be doing that just [be]cause I mean I'd have to register for club and that's just a massive time commitment, maybe in future years." MSHSL rules also dictate that a swimmer can not skip a high school practice to attend club but they can go to a club practice when there is no high school practice occurring.

For Webb, being a freshman in high school as well as an intense competitive swimmer make for a challenging week filled with long nights. He notes, "I have skipped a lot of practices because I'm sick and it's been so much easier. I mean keeping up with clubs and having projects and stuff...I also feel like teachers sometimes don't acknowledge after school activities because they don't really realize that I'm not really starting my work till like 6-7 o'clock and then I'm staying up late." Overall though, Webb has enjoyed his school year so far he concludes, "It's much looser than like middle school and I can have fun with the people around me a lot more."



Karsten Farris

Webb shares a glimpse into his thought process before breaking the record saying, "Well, behind the blocks it was really hard to figure out if we were on pace or not and we kind of have one person who always does it and he's right before me and I didn't know if we were on pace."