

Two Negatives Make a Positive

BY KATHRYN BYXBEE

I love everything about water polo. The water, the swimming, the defense and offense of the game, the goals and the blocked goals. It is such a unique sport, which is one of the main reasons why I love it so much.

On the east coast, the sport is not as popular as on the west coast, therefore the competition is not as skillful. But on the west coast, it's a whole different battlefield. The young women are stronger, faster, and worst of all, sneaky. Water polo is a very difficult sport to referee at a high level. The main reason is because 99% of the brutal action is underwater, where the referees cannot see.

When my team travels to California to play in a tournament, the girls we compete against are discrete with their holding and fighting. Most of the time, the referees do not notice the battles underwater, which can spark anger. What ends up happening is our team tries to fight back. But, not only are the west coast teams good at hiding the brawling, they are great at revealing the counter moves of the other team. This results with my teammates and I being ejected from the game, and the opposing team gaining a goal. I tend to have more exclusions than most, because I do not always hear the calls or plays. It is hard to play water polo without my hearing aids, but after so many years of playing I learned to adapt. I now have my own tricks that I use to win tournaments utilizing my hearing loss.

One of the many phrases that my coaches say is to keep your head on a swivel. It is a very important thing to do, especially for me because of my hearing loss. The first trick is to communicate before I even get into the water. I always make sure my teammates and I are on the same page. Therefore, I will not have to worry about miscommunication. My second trick is to always have at least one hand on my opponent. That way, I know where my player is at all times. If I do not hear the whistle or call, I can simply make assumptions because I am always scanning the playing field and in close contact with my player. My final trick is to be smart. I know it might sound cheesy, but it is the most important skill. In order to know what is happening without hearing, everything I do must be one step ahead of the other team. I am always aware and constantly thinking of what to do next.

If I am being honest, my hearing loss has helped me be a better player than most. When one does not have a certain sense, they must adapt by sharpening the other senses. This is not only in the water, but everywhere in my life. My training in the water has taught me lots about how my hearing loss does not have to affect me in a negative way. Learning to adapt is the best way to learn to achieve more in life. It brought me where I am today in the water, in school, and at home. I thank my hearing loss for making me so aware. Remember, two negatives always make a positive. **HL**



Kathryn "Katie" Byxbee is entering the 10th grade at the Greenwich Country Day School (GCDS). She was part of the USA Water Polo Olympic Development program in 2021–22 and will be playing in the 2022 Junior Olympics in California. She loves all water sports, polo, kayaking and swimming. Katie is part of the YMCA Greenwich Aquatics water polo team and the GCDS Varsity water polo and swim teams, but what she enjoys most is paddling around in her kayak at Adirondack camp in the summer. She and her sister both have moderate to severe sensorineural hearing loss in both ears. Email Katie's mom Jenny at jlswetckie@yahoo.com.

