

Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream.

Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily;

Life is but a dream.

If merrily stands for vomiting, trembling legs, and pure exhaustion, then sure. These are not the experiences one would typically think of when asked about their greatest sports achievement, but they were for junior UNC rower Margaret High.

High, a freshman walk-on at the time in 2016, was on a team spring break trip to Lake Lure near Asheville, NC to train. The quaint lake is tucked in by the massive Blue Ridge Mountains; symbolizing the ones High would have to climb that week.

In the early afternoon of March 13<sup>th</sup>, right before the girls on the team were about to embark on the shining blue waters of the lake, High gazed up and saw a rainbow peeking out through the rays of the sun; it was something that gave her hope, and it was a token of her good luck to come.

Her coach, Anthony Brock, had decided that she would be seat raced: a process to select which people from the novice team would make the varsity four boat. Wearing a black Nike tank top she had been surprised with on the first day of training for good luck, High was ready to take on the pressure. She had been training twice a day since August, both in the weight room and on the water.

The rookie was just not expecting how hard she was about to work.

"I didn't really have confidence in myself as a rower," High admitted. "I was so new to it and I was kind of like, I'm going to give it my best shot."

High gave it her all on the first seat race, describing it as "killing herself," figuring she would be switched out afterwards like usual. But it didn't end there, or after the next one, or the next one; not until after an incredible ten races. High had to continually row, row, row her boat.

"My arms were shaking, my legs were shaking, my whole body was just in pain," recalls High. "I just kept telling myself it'd be the last one. It was disheartening, but I just found it in me to keep going."

Her hard work paid off; High had made it into the only varsity four boat on the team. She won all ten seat races, even beating out her recruited teammates. Physically, she felt drained. She was hunched over, in extreme pain, and gasping for air. Emotionally, she was elated and proud, a smile on her face beaming as bright as the sun was above her.

"I knew that I could do it if I pushed myself hard enough, so I just did," High said.

Coach Brock came over and told her she had done a good job as she climbed out of the boat onto the shore, barely able to walk; something that certainly made her life feel like 'but a dream'.

"He didn't believe in me," High said with a furrowed brow. "He didn't think I was capable of doing it. Whenever I felt how painful it was and how easy it would be to stop trying, I kept going because I wanted to show him that he was wrong."

Proving her coach wrong sent an everlasting wave of confidence through High that still lasts today, but that was not the only thing that keep her going during the races. While she had a devil on her shoulder telling her she couldn't do it, she also had angels on the other supporting her.

"I had already developed a deep connection with the other three girls in my boat. I cared a lot about them, and they expressed that they wanted me to be in their boat," High said. "I wanted to do it for them. Whenever my legs were on fire, I would just think about how badly I wanted it." Not only were High's legs on fire, she was too. She made the varsity team as just a walk-on, which was not an easy thing to do.

"It was a dream come true from my childhood," High said, a joyous expression on her face. "I was finally an athlete for the university I cared the most about."

Sometimes, both friends *and* enemies give the push needed to help someone climb their highest mountain- and to find the pot of gold at the end of a long, beautiful rainbow.