

Year 5 & 6 Category Winner

Behind the Blocks

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Arms.

Legs.

Every single muscle, tense.

The swimmers in the water are seconds from touching the wall. My heat is next. My heart pounds like a drum in my chest. I stare down at the water, hoping for a great race. Hoping to feel proud. Hoping the training pays off.

Adrenaline rushes through me like a waterfall. I fidget with my goggles, trying to get them to sit just right, but nothing feels perfect. I feel unsure. Unready. But it's too late now to change anything.

All I can do is trust my training.

The countless early mornings and afternoons.

Waking up at 5 a.m. while the world still sleeps.

Endless laps. Burning legs.

Dives that stretched so far it felt like I was landing in another country.

Every moment of that training has led me to this race.

The whistle blows. The swimmers beside me leap onto the blocks, and I follow. My feet grip the edge. I crouch. I'm ready to fly.

"Take your marks," the starter says.

Pause.

"HUP!"

That pause is the worst part. It stretches time, filling my head with nerves.

Then I launch. I explode off the block. For a second, I'm flying, not falling, not diving, just soaring through the air.

Then...

Splash.

The water wraps around me like a second skin. Cool, clean, alive. It slides over my shoulders and rushes past my ears. It's a whisper, then a roar. It trickles down my back like icy fingers, wraps around my ankles, and finally settles as I glide beneath the surface. It holds me for a moment, just me and the blue silence, before I start to kick.

I slice through the water like an arrow, pushing forward, lungs tight. My arms scoop and pull, grabbing as much water as they can. My feet flick behind me like a dolphin tail.

Flip!

Kick!

HARDER!

I turn off the wall and fly again. It's the last lap. No more holding back.

I don't breathe for the final ten metres. I give it everything. It's all in or nothing.

SLAM.

My hands hit the wall.

I look up.

The giant screen glows.

First place.

Personal best.

My lungs are bursting, but my heart is soaring. I feel over the moon.

My arms are still tense, but they begin to relax. Around me, the other swimmers hit the wall and sigh with relief. The swimmer beside me smiles at the screen, then his smile fades. The letters DSQ blink next to his name. Disqualified.

My joy is real. But I feel a twinge of sadness. I'm glad it wasn't me, but I know how that must feel. All that training. All that hope. Gone in a second.

In that moment, I realise what matters.

It's not just the medal.

It's not just the time.

The feeling. The journey.

The splash of the water. The silence beneath it. The push to keep going when everything burns.

It's the sport. The one, I love.

That's what matters.