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Swimmer says having 'world's best' friends, family keeps her grounded

by Julie Filby by Catholic News Service



Missy Franklin of the U.S. poses with her gold medal after winning the women's 100 backstroke final Monday at the London 2012 Olympic Games at the Aquatics Center. Franklin is a senior at Regis Jesuit High School in Aurora, Colo., in the Denver Archdiocese. (CNS/Reuters/David Gray)

DENVER -- For swimmer Missy Franklin, a rising senior at Regis Jesuit High School in Aurora, "there is nothing like wearing a cap with my country's flag on it."

"I always remember, though, that I'm not just representing the U.S. but also my family, friends, team, school and Colorado."

She made those comments early this year in a Q-and-A interview with the *Denver Catholic Register*, newspaper of the Denver Archdiocese.

That was before she earned a spot on the U.S. women's Olympic swimming team, before she was a gold medalist.

Ranked first in the world in the 200 freestyle and 200 backstroke, first in the country in the 100 freestyle, and second in the 100 backstroke, she was at that point still some months away from the Olympic swim trials in Omaha, Neb. She had just set a record-breaking performance at the girls' 5A Colorado championship swim meet in Fort Collins.

It would be an understatement to say a lot has happened to her since then. The youngest member of the women's swimming team, the 6-foot-1 Franklin won the gold medal in the women's 100 backstroke final Monday.

After her spectacular win, *Washington Post* reporter Janice D'Arcy called her "one of America's new sweethearts" and said the teen "is rewriting the Olympic script" with the way she and her family have approached her training. Unlike so many athletes, Franklin has stayed with the same coach she has had since childhood and has remained part of her same swim club all these years, according to D'Arcy.

When it comes to her high school teammates at Regis, Franklin told the *Register*: "I love swimming with my Regis Jesuit sisters. I'm so proud of each and every one of them. Nick Frasersmith, my high school coach; and Todd Schmitz, my club coach, worked together so I could fit high school swimming into my training."

Franklin started swimming competitively when she was 5 years old.

Asked how she has stayed grounded with all her success and the attention it has brought, Franklin said: "I have the best friends and family in the whole world."

"I love being with them and having fun. My friends and I do all the usual high school activities including going to dances, out to see movies, and shopping," she said.

At home, she and her parents, Richard and D.A. Franklin, "don't talk about swimming, but enjoy just being together," she said. The Franklin household includes Ruger, an 8-year-old Alaskan Malamute.

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"We support each other and enjoy great family moments such as cuddling on the couch, in front of the fire, watching *The Sound of Music*," she told the *Register*. "I have the best support system in the world."

Franklin is not a Catholic, but she said life as a student at a Jesuit-run high school has her considering joining the church.

"My experiences at Regis Jesuit have absolutely impacted my spiritual life, in so many ways. I am considering converting to Catholicism; I'm currently Protestant," she said.

"Going into Regis Jesuit, my faith was not a very big aspect of my life. Taking my first theology classes, going to my first Masses, going on my first retreats, I began to realize how important God is in my life and how much I love him and need him," she continued.

Franklin said her relationship with God grew so much in her first three years at the school. "I am very happy with where I am with him right now, although there is a lot of more work to do," she added.

Her junior year really affected her. "I have had two of the best experiences of my life," she said, referring

to the annual Kairos retreat for juniors she attended and her participation in a two-week service project.

"Both of these changed my life," Franklin said. "I am so thankful for Regis Jesuit, for they have brought God and so much meaning into my life."

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