



**DARA TORRES**, *Olympic Medalist*

## An Overwhelming Drive to Win Again and Again

**I** FEEL LIKE I'M ONE WITH the water, like I was meant to be in the water. Strap some gills on me and I'll just live in the water. It's peaceful, serene. I feel comfortable in the water. No one bothers you when you're in the water. You can think when you're in the water.

The earliest thing I remem-

ber is the pool we had in our backyard. It had a step that went all the way around the side of the pool, so when I was little, I would stand and walk along the step with my four brothers and sister.

I was always athletically inclined. In PE, I was the first one picked on teams before boys were. Swimming always

came naturally to me, and I had a lot of speed. My speed is different from other people's speed. If you watch me swim in a race, you'll see my competitors take two strokes to my one.

I don't know exactly why I've done well, but I know I've surrounded myself with the best. I'm probably genetically gifted. I want it, and I probab-

ly want it more than other people want it. I want it bad, and I want to win. I'm ultra-competitive.

This year at the Olympics, I loved the relays because they are a team event. It was great to be swimming with girls you swim against all year long in the United States, and then you come together as a team. The oldest was 25. I was 16 years older, so they were basically about a year old when I swam in my first Olympic Games.

I got three silvers in the Beijing Olympics, but I had mixed feelings when I lost gold in the 50 meters by a hundredth of a second. It would have been easier to lose by more. A hundredth of a second—you can't even blink that fast, that's how close it is. If I

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hadn't filed my nails, maybe I would have at least tied or won. My mom is usually the one who knows me best, who probably knows what was going on in my head when I touched the wall. She sort of goes through the same emotions that I do; she was bummed but also proud.

I've been in five Olympic Games in 24 years. People have told me how I inspired them. That's a much more rewarding feeling than bringing home medals. People think they are too old to do something. Others put off doing something or don't think they could balance being a parent and doing their work, so I guess they like my story. I feel like I'm going out there and doing my thing and loving what I'm doing. I didn't do it to try to show that a 41-year-old could do this. It just ended up that way.