

Orange County girls swimming athlete of the year: Elise Garcia of Crean Lutheran



Crean Lutheran High School swimmer Elise Garcia is the Register's girls swimmer of the year in Irvine, CA, on Wednesday, May 30, 2018. (Photo by Jeff Gritchen, Orange County Register/SCNG)

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Elise Garcia faced a well-known nemesis in swimming before her final season at Crean Lutheran.

After years of consistently dropping time, swimmers often are challenged when their performances level off or plateau.

This mental opponent becomes as real as any rival in the next lane but Garcia found a way to break through the potential barrier and rise to the competition.

The senior embraced being consistent, sharpened her mental approach and focused on the aspects of the sport that she loves most, such as racing. The results followed.

Garcia paced Orange County in the 100-yard butterfly and shared the fastest time in the 50 freestyle. She also captured two more CIF-Southern Section titles in Division 2 and cemented her legacy as one of the county's all-time sprinters.

For her efforts, the Cal-bound Garcia is The Register's girls swimmer of the year.

Garcia, who is 5-foot-5, won the butterfly at the Division 2 finals in 52.92 seconds, the fastest from any division finals in the section. The touch was about two tenths of a second off her lifetime-best of 52.70 from 2017 but was still her high school-best time and ranks her third in county history.

The SOCAL club swimmer also won the 50 freestyle at the Division 2 finals for an impressive fourth consecutive year, blazing a time of 22.71 seconds. The time matched the touch of Division 1 champion Anicka Delgado of Santa Margarita.

Garcia finished seven one-hundredths off her lifetime-best time - a 22.64 from her sophomore season - but she showed her consistency and departs the county as the second-fastest girl in the 50. She's about a tenth of a second off Lindsey Engel's 22.53 for Crean Lutheran in 2013.

"I'm happy it's still in Crean's hands," Garcia said of the Engel's O.C. record. "Being consistent is what's important and eventually you'll break that barrier and go faster."

Garcia said her work with Newport Beach sports psychologist Benjamin Strack has helped strengthen her mental approach. She focuses on creating routines before races and enjoying her journey in the sport.

"I was doubting myself a little bit," Garcia said. "All you can do is give it your all and see what happens My mental strength has improved a lot and that was important (this season), especially before college."

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Dan Albano

Dan Albano has been a high school sports writer at The Orange County Register since 1993. He covers football and all the aquatics: boys and girls water polo and boys and girls swimming. Dan's passion for water sports has earned him the nickname, Aqua Dan, in the newsroom and taken him to multiple U.S. Olympic Swim Trials and many USA water polo events as a reporter. He also writes about high school football recruiting, including The Register's annual FAB 15 teams that list the top high school football players in the Western U.S. before National Signing Day. He compiles the Hot 150 list of football players to watch in Orange County before each season. During football season, he also partners with Steve Fryer and Jonathan Khamis on **OCVarsity.com's** Gridiron Show and hosts a weekly podcast on Trinity League football. In 2015, Dan received the Bud Dwyer Jr. media award from the Southern California High School Football Coaches Association. Dan is a graduate of Cal State Fullerton, where he worked at The Daily Titan as a news reporter, sports reporter, managing editor and opinion editor.

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