

For the record, Kirsty Coventry captured gold (200 back, 2:09.19), silver (100 back, 1:00.50) and bronze (200 IM, 2:12.72) at the Olympics in Athens. She became the first-ever swimming gold medalist for Zimbabwe. Her story is a fascinating one in which her accomplishments completely transcended sports, the Olympics and even the turmoil that characterizes her native Zimbabwe. Be sure to read, "An Unlikely Hero," in the February issue of Swimming World Magazine.

Following is a Q and A with Kirsty, who spoke with Craig Lord, our European correspondent from Great Britain:

Q: What were the conditions in which you swam back home...was it a private pool, private club and were there black swimmers training alongside you?

A: It was awesome. I have a very close-knit family and we always had a Sunday lunch and spent the day together, all aunts, uncles, cousins. I loved going to Kariba (which is our biggest lake) on the house boat, fishing and laying in the sun. The sunsets were incredible and I spent my favorite time of day watching the animals coming down to the water--elephants, water buck, impala, zebra, giraffe. My grandparents on my dad's side were involved in swimming. My parents, especially my dad and his brothers, were all very sporty, especially in swimming. My mom taught me how to swim when I was 18 months and I started at a club called Highlands when I was 6 years old. Then I moved to Otters for a couple of months, then I have been at Pirates with Mr. and Mrs. Mathieson since I was 12. I have been at Pirates for most of my swimming career. We swam at a high school pool and it was open to anybody who wanted to swim, all ages.

Q: I believe your family were just about all swimmers, including your granddad.. Obviously none of them were quite as good as you. But how far did they get, to what level did they swim, and did they do any other sports (is it true you came from what the media likes to call 'a sporty family')?

A: Yes I came from a very sporty family. They all played a lot of sports. My uncle swam for Zimbabwe.

Q: Your family runs a chemicals business in Harare, according to reports. What is the business, is it agribusiness, pool chemicals (what is the nature of the business, and is it family owned?)

A: Yes, it is called Omnicem, it is all household chemicals--from laundry to cleaning.

Q: What is a typical day for you?

A: I wake up around 5.30 a.m. for practice at 6. Then it is off to class at 9 a.m. until about 1 p.m., then it's lunch and back to the pool at 3 p.m. I am a hotel and restaurant major and minoring in business.

Q: What's a hard set?

A: 3 by 800 on 14:00 with 4 x 50's loosen, best average.

Q: How is life at Auburn? Do you like campus life? When you're not swimming, what kinds of things do you like to do and who do you hang out with?

A: I love Auburn: it was the best decision I have made in my life so far. It is like having a huge family with 50 sisters and brothers. The coaches are great role models and it's all very family oriented, so that helped a lot when I was homesick. Kim (Brackin) is not only a great coach but has been a great friend and a great mother figure. I hang out a lot with the team. We watch movies, go out, and just enjoy spending time with each other.

Q: How often do you get back to Zimbabwe? Did you go back for the Christmas-New Year break? And if so, where do you train?

A: I usually try and go home every summer, and I got to spend Christmas with my family in England this year, which was awesome. I train with my club coach.

Q: Montreal is the big one for next summer. Will the focus be medley and backstroke?

A: Yeah! I'm planning on being there. I'm not too sure about the program yet, but I'm pretty sure I will be swimming the backstrokes and medleys.

Q: Why Auburn?

A: Because they are the best and the coaches and team were so welcoming. The coaching staff is amazing and I thank them for giving me the chance to be a part of this great team.