



Photo by Adrian Etheridge - Contributing Photographer

Senior swims despite spinal surgery

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UNC Asheville senior Hallie Gillespie made her comeback on the 200 yard relay after months of recovering from major injuries.

Starting off with just minor back pain in March, Gillespie continued to feel the pain progress more and more every day. She consulted two therapists, a chiropractor, an orthopedic surgeon and even did dry needling. No one had an answer and the pain continued to grow.

"I continued to swim and then I began to lose my motor skills. One day I was swimming at practice and my right foot wasn't kicking. I thought it was, but it wasn't. My coach was like, 'Oh my god your right foot isn't moving.' It was pretty scary, after a year of being athletic and swimming and just having this thing happen," said Gil-

lespie.

Following her loss of mobility, Gillespie felt like she had no choice but to see a neurosurgeon, who determined that she had a bone spur growth in a nerve tunnel that needed to be removed.

"That week was horrible. I don't even want to remember that week.

I still have back pain, because that problem wasn't really solved. I go see a massage therapist every week, but I'm definitely improving. Last Saturday, Coach just anchored me out for the relay, and I mean I just dove in," Gillespie said.

Gillespie said her inspiration to fight through the pain came from those closest to her.

"I'm not going to say it felt really great, because it hurt obviously. But to be rac-

ing with people cheering for me, people who have been supportive of me for so long made it incredible," Gillespie

Swimming is not a just a sport, but a lifestyle."

— Hallie Gillespie
Senior, swim team member

said.

Coach Elizabeth Lykins said Gillespie never left the team because of her injury and she always continued in playing a vital role for everyone.

"Hallie never left the team. She has been with the team training, rehabbing after surgery, traveling, volunteering and every other activity team members have done the entire

year and always in a contributing role," said Lykins.

Gillespie earned her highest ever collegiate GPA during the fall 2013 semester and helped lead the team in earning Scholar All-America Team status for the third consecutive semester.

"Hallie is one of only two seniors on the swim team so her role as a leader is huge. We all look to her for advice," said Galen Broido, a sophomore on the UNCA women's swim team.

In and out of the pool, Gillespie continues to strive to make sure that not just her, but everyone around her, gets the best of her.

"I work hard and I try to set a good example. I'm one of the oldest on the team so what I try to do is set an example for the other girls and give them something that they

can look up to. I don't know if that's what being a leader is, but I just try to be the best for them," said Hallie.

According to Lykins, Gillespie brings encouragement to her team.

"Her attitude and presence at practices and meets is contagious: always encouraging, supportive and helpful to her teammates and coaches. Hallie is a staple of the inaugural swimming program at UNC Asheville," Lykins said.

Broido said Gillespie never once showed a negative attitude during her injury and continued to stay positive about her situation, helping the team in any way, shape or form she could.

Gillespie, a graduating senior for the upcoming fall semester, said swimming for her has become that puzzle piece

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