

A TEAM TO BE PROUD OF

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They won 43 medals, second best at last weekend's CARI FTA Swimming Championships in Barbados. They won more individual events than any other country. There are, however, other reasons to be proud of our Cayman Islands national swim team.

Before they had even left Cayman, the team revealed its character by electing Lizzy Haines captain. On most sports teams the captain is the alpha athlete, the unrivaled star. Little Lizzy, however, had never even won a single medal in six years of swimming. But in her they saw a determined athlete who always worked hard, never gave up and most of importantly, cared about them. Lizzy finally got her medal, a bronze in a relay. Years from now it surely will be her teammates' love and not the medal that will warm her memories.

A cruel car crash stole the life of Landon von Kanel last year. He won Cayman's first-ever swim medals back in 1996. He will long be remembered for both his personality and that historic feat that launched a march of swimming success that shows no sign of slowing. Landon's parents attended the meet in Barbados to award the first memorial trophy in their son's name. To win it, however, a swimmer must match Landon's 1996 double gold medals in the 200 and 400 metre freestyle events. If nobody achieves the double, nobody gets the trophy. So when a Jamaican athlete stepped up for the 400m freestyle final after winning the 200m, he was greeted with thundering cheers not only from the Jamaicans in attendance but also from the Cayman contingent. Helped in part by this wave of encouragement, he won. Landon's parents presented him the trophy and some four thousand eyes became very moist, including those of the Jamaican swimmer's mother.

All athletes must sign a contract that binds them to exemplary behaviour if they wish to represent the Cayman Islands in international swim meets. They are specifically required to positively reflect their country and their team. No one knows for sure if it is the piece of paper or perhaps something else, but discipline problems are virtually unheard of in the junior swim programme. Additionally, all of the national team members are above average students.

It is good to see so many medals come home, but regardless of how many races they win or lose, we can all be proud of these young people and the adults who lead them.