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By Melissa Juergensen

Heather Macdonald was 13 years old when she took her first plunge into competitive swimming – and she’s been doing it ever since.

At 18, Macdonald left her small hometown, Edson, Albt., to begin a busy future in Ottawa; no longer making waves in a pond, but rather an ocean.

Under coach Alex Diep, she trained eight times a week with the Edson Orcas, often by herself because the majority of the swimmers on her team were under age ten.

Now at Carleton University, the first-year aerospace engineering student says she is being exposed to a team aspect of sport, for the first time in her life.

“It’s overwhelming because I’ve never seen so many people on deck before,” she says.

“I’ve never trained so fast in my life... like never. There’s a lot more motivation with the team. I’m really impressed. I’ve never been pushed like this in practice and it’s obviously paying off.”

Macdonald says she has already swam personal best times in four events this year, despite the fact that the team is in the middle of hard training.

She also says she likes to race a good mix of everything, chuckling as she reveals her “secret love” for the 400-metre Individual Medley, a race where you swim 100-metres of each stroke.

Her top performance so far this season was at the OUA fall sprint relay meet, held Oct. 16, in Guelph, where Macdonald was the first swimmer this year, to swim under Canadian Interuniversity Sport qualifying time standards.

Macdonald swam the 50-metre breaststroke in 32.25 seconds, 0.24 seconds under the CIS cut.

“It was kind of exciting,” she says. “Most people probably don’t expect this from a rookie. It felt good, but it was kind of like a mixed reaction because I didn’t go a best time, but I still qualified. It was good, but not as good as it could be.”

Macdonald was named Carleton University’s female athlete of the week, for the week of Oct. 10- 17, for her CIS qualifying performance.

Her best time for the 100-metre breaststroke is also under the CIS cut, but in order to qualify, Macdonald must swim under the standard during this year’s swim season.

She is also close in the 200-metre breaststroke, 50-metre freestyle and 50-metre butterfly.

Macdonald says that whenever she has a good race, there is nothing in her head except for the sound of bubbles.

“When I listen to the water, I do good. When I think, it goes downhill,” she says.

Aside from having fun, Macdonald says her goal for this season is to final at the CIS championships, which will be in Edmonton this year, about a two-hour drive from her hometown.