



MJ Macias '23 performs a front dive at swim practice. After moving from Mexico, she now dives for Monarch.

INTO DEEPER waters

SKILLED DIVER STRUGGLES WITH MOVE TO U.S.

By Macby Aleo

A young girl, no more than eight years old, stood 33 feet above glittering blue water, her knees wobbling as she looked down. MJ Macias '23 had been waiting for this moment for almost four years.

When she was only four or five, she her soon-to-be idol, Mexican diver Paola Espinosa, on television.

"She was diving off of a ten-meter, and she was just so good," Macias, a native Mexican, said. "I told my mom I wanted to do that, and she told me I was not going to be a diver because it isn't safe."

After her mom had put her into gymnastics for several months as a safer, dryer alternative, Macias got back to begging for her dream of becoming a diver.

"We started searching for pools, and we found out that five minutes from our house in Mexico was the pool where the Olympic team was practicing," Macias said. "I went, and then I saw the girl I saw on TV, and I realized it was my home."

Macias had found her happy place but soon faced one more problem: her age. After being told she couldn't practice or compete with the professionals at five years old, Macias turned to a kid's coach to gain skills at the very same pool where Espinosa and other Olympic divers practiced.

"They told me if, in a few years, they see I have talent, I could come train with them," Macias said. "I started growing into my sport, and when I was eight, I competed, and then I won."

Shortly after her first competition, Macias had the opportunity to try out for a selective program for little kids to be molded into Olympic divers. Out of around 30 kids, Macias was one of three to make it.

"I started with the one-meter diving board and got all the way to the seven-meter," she said. "And then I got to the ten-meter. When you see the water from that high up, it's insane. I always get worried

about smacking the board or the water."

Macias eventually figured out the key to diving.

"When you put too much pressure on yourself, it's harder to do because you already have fear and pressure is even worse," Macias said. "You have to find your way, have a strategy, and make yourself go for the dive."

But when Macias moved to the United States when she was 17-years-old, diving off the ten-meter became the least of her problems.

"I had to say goodbye to my friends and to my family," she said. "We moved from Mexico because we were having some problems over there with the economy during the pandemic."

Macias had to leave her entire life in Mexico behind, and starting over in the U.S. became more of a challenge than she had expected.

"I remember those first two weeks were so hard," Macias said. "I just tried to distract myself and tried to avoid the fact that we were not in my house or in my country. Making new friends and speaking a different language was kind of hard, but not seeing my dad very often is the hardest."

Macias has begun to embrace the change in her life in a positive light, rather than focusing on the negatives.

"There are good and bad things about every change, and I prefer to see the good ones," she said. "I was so worried about making a mistake, but right now, I feel more comfortable here. Now that I have more friends and I'm more adapted, it's better."

Her international move not only impacted her personal life, but her diving track, as well.

"There is not a good pool near here where I can practice diving," Macias said. "It's so hard because there are not many options. In Mexico, there were good options, but I was under a lot of pressure."

Through it all, Macias has once again focused on the positives within the big change.

"But at least there are two one-meter boards here," she said. "It was a good change because it gives me the opportunity to actually compete here, in the United States."

Regardless of all the struggles she has faced, Macias has embraced them and stuck with her passion for diving.

"In all the years I have been doing this, I feel like it's all worth it," Macias said. "It's like the saying, the brave one is not the one that's scared. It's the one that faces it."