

From Pup to Professional

STARTING WITH SEAL MISSIONS, ZACH MILLER ADVANCES THROUGH PADI RANKS BY MATTHEW WINKLER, TEEN EDITOR

C'MON, WE'RE GOING to a dive shop!"

For his family's upcoming trip to Cancún, Zach Miller knew he'd have to pack his swimsuit and sunblock. But he never imagined that his father would tell him just that, and drive him, along with his brother, to the PADI Five-Star Aquatic Realm Scuba Center in Dayton, Ohio, to take a Discover Scuba Diving program — a three-hour introduction to the sport that kids as young as 10 can take — in preparation for the trip.

Long after the Cancún tan faded, Zach, at age 13, enrolled in the PADI Seal Team program. Like most teens, he thought about how cool breathing underwater was. However, what kept him interested in diving was the different Aqua Missions. He remembers skills like swimming through hula hoops and carrying an egg — a plastic one with a weight in it — on a spoon, which “slows you down and forces you to control your buoyancy.” For the night missions, “they'd turn off all the lights around the pool, and there was a fake reef and fake fish down there.”

Going through the Seal program inspired Zach to earn the Open Water certification with his brother. One of the reasons that he kept with it is that he found diving “mentally more challenging than football, soccer or hockey.” From there, advancing through the PADI ranks was really just one step at a time.

When Zach was 18 and in high school, he found time between his other after-school activities and enrolled in the Divemaster course, which Zach says taught him how to better interact with people. After finishing the certification, he saw that people looked up to him. As a divemaster, he says, “You get more respect than most teenagers ever would.”

Zach not only excels at diving, but is now attending St. Francis College in Indiana on a football scholarship. When asked about working with those interested in trying scuba, Zach says, “I'd love to teach them. It'd be the best gift you could give me.”



TOP TO BOTTOM: COURTESY ZACH MILLER; LOUISE MURRAY/ALAMY

Top to bottom: Zach Miller, all suited up; a PADI Seal Team pool session