



# TX Sense Abilities

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FAMILY WISDOM

## **United Swimmer Fights through Blindness: Gallegos Tries to Set Example in Pool**

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*Abstract: A student with a visual impairment finds a sport that he enjoys and competes in area swim competitions.*

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United swimmer Angel Gallegos was born legally blind, but that hasn't stopped him from being a three-year letterman for the Longhorns.

For eighth grade he moved to Austin to attend the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, where he learned that he needed to pick a sport that suited him. It was between joining the track team and swimming, but it was the pool that won his heart.

"When I was at TSBVI, it gave me inspiration," Gallegos said. "These guys are like me, they have disabilities, but they can still play sports. So when I came back to Laredo, I just needed to choose a sport that suited me."

Gallegos' doctor told him he wasn't allowed to participate in contact sports, so he sought out another avenue.

"At first I was shocked because I have done all these sports all these years and right when I was getting to high school, they tell me that I cannot play them anymore. I just told myself that there are other sports that I can play."

As Gallegos heads to this weekend's District 29-5A swimming meet in Corpus Christi Saturday for the third consecutive year, his personal goal is to finish in the top seven and he's also hoping to make a trip to regionals.

"Angel is a joy to have on the swim team," UISD coach Paul Kane said. "No matter what events that I put him in, he is one of the few students that just says, 'OK, I will give it a shot.' He will not give up and he does not let his disability get in the way."

"He does everything possible to make sure he is able to participate. He just does not quit or give up on himself."

Gallegos has no vision in his right eye but, with the help of glasses, can see with his left eye. He has learned to compensate in the pool by counting his strokes across the length of the pool and knows when to make the turn at the wall. He also uses prescription goggles so he can see underwater.

The first time that he got into the pool he felt different because he had never swum in competition. But swimming has also helped Gallegos cope with his asthma because it exercises his lungs and he hasn't had any asthma attacks since he first stepped in the pool three years ago.

"This helps my lungs," Gallegos said. "As well as being legally blind and having asthma problems, it has not stopped me from doing what I love, which is playing sports. Swimming is considered a sport and I am just going to keep on doing what I love."

While Gallegos has not been able to place at the last three district meets, he has seen his time drop dramatically from the first time he jumped into the pool as a freshman.

"My times have improved a lot since my freshman year," Gallegos said. "I have really worked hard. In my first year I just wanted to try out the sport and I like it, so I decided to come back for my second year and I already knew what I had to do to improve."

Gallegos almost never misses practice and is a team player, according to Kane. If Kane needs him in a long distance event, Gallegos is always up for the challenge.

One aspect that Gallegos loves about swimming is the camaraderie that UISD teams show toward each other when they attend swimming meets or in practice. Since UISD only has one swimming coach for all four schools, they all practice together and attend the same meets.

"What I love about this sport that is not like other sports, in football or basketball you compete against each other," Gallegos said. "In swimming all four schools (are) all together. Yes, we may be rivals when we go to events or meets but when we practice, we practice together. I just like that we are all together; we are doing the same thing."

When he steps into the pool, Gallegos wants to show everyone his disability never held him back.

"People can do anything, it does not matter that they have a disability, you can play sports," he said. "Before I leave United High School I just want people to know that I am able to swim and my disability does not slow me down – you just learn to compensate. I just want to let students that have disabilities know they can join sports."

