

Girls Who SAIL

By Samantha League



Sisters Aitana and Lorea Mendiguren '16 are competitive sailors, traveling the nation to compete in co-ed contests. Photo courtesy of Aitana and Lorea

Aitana and Lorea Mendiguren's '16 mother

always enjoyed driving the girls over the Coronado bridge to visit their grandfather: it gave her a perfect view of the “pretty sailboats.” She loved it so much that once her family moved from Spain to San Diego, she enrolled eight-year-old Aitana and Lorea in sailing classes.

Two years later, the girls began sailing competitively for the Coronado Yacht Club and now travel the U.S. to compete. They primarily sail a 2-person boat, and they do it together.

“I see it as such a blessing having my sister as a teammate,” Aitana says. “When we were younger we used to fight a lot... but as we got older, we’ve definitely become a lot closer.”

The girls sail Club 420’s, which are 16-foot boats. Aitana is the skipper, controlling the main sail and steering, while Lorea is the crewmember, balancing the power of the sails with her bodyweight. One of Lorea’s favorite techniques is trapezing, where she hangs off the edge of the boat in a harness. According to her, “trapezing is better than any rollercoaster.”

Years of sailing together have paid off in competitions. Last summer, the girls placed 15th out of 200 teams in the national Triple Crown competition, and were the top female team to place overall.

They also came in first place for a few races at the Club 420 Nationals in Rhode Island last year. “The first day we started off the race and literally bounced away from everyone,” Aitana beams. “Two of my guy friends were like, ‘How did you do that? How did you point so high and go so fast?’”

Sailing is one of the few sports where women and men can compete against each other. Although more women have started sailing, it is still a male-dominated sport.

“Men have reacted aggressively when we pass them on the water because they don’t see us as a threat [to winning] to start off with,” Lorea says. “They’ve yelled profanities and have tried to sabotage us on the water.”

Dealing with these reactions is stressful, but beating the boys in a race is extremely rewarding. “To be able to prove [those stereotypes] wrong is incredible. We take all of our ‘disadvantages’ and just make them work for us,” Lorea elaborates.

Sailing has allowed Aitana and Lorea to explore characteristics that are not always encouraged in girls. When you’re on the water, you must learn how to assess risks, trust your instincts and be self-reliant. These crucial skills are necessary for making independent decisions with confidence.

“ I see it as such a blessing having my sister as a teammate

“Those are all things that eventually in life, you’ll grasp, but sailing really accelerated it for me at an earlier age,” Lorea reflects. She also recognizes that the skills learned on the water have helped her excel at OLP. “I don’t think I’d be where I am now academically, or on a social level, if I hadn’t started sailing,” Lorea says.

Both girls were very involved in student clubs over the past four years and have made deep friendships. They expect to miss their OLP community the most once they leave for college. As Lorea says, “There’s something about OLP... it’s cheesy, but there’s a sisterhood. It’s not just because we’re a private school or because we’re an all-girls school – it’s just the way OLP is structured. It gives us ways to bond as a class. I don’t think there will be a place where I can be so close to people all at once, like a community.”

Our new alumnae sisters will also miss each other when they head off to different colleges in the fall. Aitana was recruited by George Washington University to sail as a skipper in college, and Lorea will be attending the University of Southern California where she can join a club varsity team.

“ I don’t think I’d be where I am now academically, or on a social level, if I hadn’t started sailing

They still have this summer to sail together, too. They are both teaching at the Coronado Yacht Club and are competing in the U.S. Junior Women’s Doublehanded Championship in Missouri July 5-10.

The girls have capsized, fallen into shark-infested waters and pulled their boat out of mud, but wouldn’t trade their experiences for a different kind of sport. “It’s one of the only sports where you’re one with the elements. When I’m standing on the side of the boat in a harness and look out, I just see how beautiful everything is,” Lorea says. “You’re so aware of God’s creation. It’s incredible.”



Sister SPOTLIGHT

Aitana (left)

Attending:
George Mason University

Majoring In:
Physical therapy

OLP Activities:
Section President, Four Years; Blood Drive Committee; Green Team (Secretary); Kiwins; Red Cross School Club; Track and Field

Other Accomplishments:
Pilates certified

Lorea (right)

Attending:
University of Southern California

Majoring In:
English and biochemistry

OLP Activities:
Mock Trial; Academic League; Junior Retreat Leader; Speech & Debate Team; Culinary Club; Peer Tutor; Pilot Press

Other Accomplishments:
Internship at San Diego Family magazine