



PULLING TOGETHER

Stretching for their Olympic dreams has helped the Palermo twins, Lucía and Mariano, realize they cannot reach their ultimate goal alone. Above: Lucía and a teammate compete in a race before the 2004 Athens Olympics.

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Excitement thundered through Mariano Palermo's veins as he and his teammate rowed past the 1,000-meter mark in first place. They were halfway to his dream of winning the 2003 Argentine national rowing championship in men's pairs and a shot at participating in qualifiers for the 2004 Olympics in Athens, Greece.

They had settled into a great rhythm—their strong strokes catching the water in perfect harmony and propelling them ahead of the competition.

However, a few hundred meters later, Mariano's excitement chilled when fatigue began to slow his teammate's pace.

Mariano eyed the second-place boat not far behind. Would the lead they had built up be enough to get them to the finish line first?

"We Are Very United"

Mariano's twin sister, Lucía, had her own doubles race to concentrate on a little later that day, but she made sure she was there to watch her brother compete. She was thrilled when his team leaped out to such a quick lead. But her heart sank when she saw their pace drop off.

The Palermo twins have always been very close. Being the same age and involved in many of the same activities, they have always spent a lot of time together.

"Mutual, seminary, school," Lucía lists. "Now that we're older, it's a little different, but we still train together."

The twins, members of the Pacheco Ward, Buenos Aires Argentina Litoral Stake, are also united by other interests. They both enjoy working with their hands—Lucía doing handicrafts or sewing



and Mariano working on cars.

“I love to cook,” Lucía adds.

“And I like to eat, so we’re a good team,” laughs Mariano. “I like to cook with her. I’m not very good at it, but it’s fun.”

While the two get along really well—“We can talk about anything,” says Lucía—Mariano says most people don’t realize they’re twins. The two don’t look alike.

“And we don’t know what the other is thinking,” Lucía says, joking about how twins are sometimes portrayed. “But we’re very affected by what happens to the other, whether in school or in competition. We are very united. It’s a beautiful thing.”

Life Is a Team Event

When Mariano felt his teammate’s pace slowing, he knew it didn’t matter how strong he felt. If Mariano pulled his oar harder or faster than his teammate did, the unbalanced effort would send the boat off course.

He matched his teammate’s pace and watched as the competitors started gaining on them.

As twins, Mariano and Lucía share many things. Among them is a fierce drive to train hard and give their best individual effort to reach their goals. But in team rowing, individual effort alone won’t get you across the finish line first. The twins have learned that if you aren’t in sync with your teammates, you won’t win.

“The effectiveness of the boat depends on unity,” Mariano says. “We’ve got to be thinking the same, whether it’s a team of two, four, or eight.”

“If we’re not working together—” begins Lucía.

“Precisely,” Mariano interjects.

“—the boat won’t work,” she finishes.

It’s a principle the two understand not only as rowers but as twins and as members of the Church.

“When the team is focused on the same objective, it’s much easier to obtain,” Mariano says. “It’s the same with our family. We have the same goal to be together forever. That helps a ton.”

The two understand that working together is essential



to life on earth. We cannot return to our Heavenly Father's presence on our own (see Romans 3:23).

Fortunately, the Savior was willing to put Himself in our boat through the Atonement (see Alma 7:11–12), providing the way to the finish line, where our Heavenly Father is.

But as in rowing, in order to win the prize we must be willing to give up anything that would keep us from rowing in harmony with the Lord. *Atonement* means to be reconciled or restored to harmony. Achieving harmony requires being willing to give up all our sins (see Alma 22:18), put off worldly desires, and do the Lord's will (see Mosiah 3:19).

That's not always easy, but the Savior knows the "race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1), and He knows exactly what we need in order to return to our Father's presence.

If we choose not to follow Him, preferring to do things our own way, we are out of sync and in danger of slowing our progress or even putting ourselves out of the race.

We Achieve More Together

In life as well as in athletics, some would rather set their own pace, believing that individuality is the way to true freedom. They choose to row through life alone, not realizing that with Jesus Christ, they could achieve so much more (see Mark 10:27).

In the rowing world, it is well-known that "a team working together can go much faster than an individual," Lucía explains.

On the standard 2,000-meter course, a good time for a single male rower at his best pace is under seven minutes (the world record is 6:35.40). On a team of eight, however, that same rower, even though he may

Just as it took teamwork in addition to individual effort to win the awards they have, the Palermo twins know they must trust in the Savior and be diligent in the gospel to obtain their ultimate goal of returning to Heavenly Father.

not only in rowing but in reaching our ultimate goal to become like Jesus Christ and return to our Heavenly Father's presence. The Lord said, "Be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine" (D&C 38:27).

Once we've learned that life is not a singles competition but a team event, each of us faces a very important spiritual decision.

Whom Do I Follow?

As the second-place team pulled alongside Mariano's boat, it took real discipline for him not to give in to the temptation to row as hard as possible. The finish line was so close. But Mariano knew that rowing at his own pace could be disastrous. At best it would only slow them down; at worst it would send them off course and possibly out of the race.

This choice to follow someone else's pace rather than our own in order to reach our goal is an important principle when applied

be matched with slower individual rowers, could go even faster. The world record for a team of eight is 5:19.85.

Just as it would be difficult for a single rower to beat a unified team, without the Savior, we cannot obtain our eternal goals.

You Win Some; You Lose Some

Mariano and his teammate refused to give up. But shortly before the finish line, they were passed, leaving them in second place.

Lucía was at the boat ramp when Mariano pulled his boat out after the race. She had her own race coming up to think about, but when she saw his disappointed tears, she broke down herself.

“I knew how hard he had worked,” she says. “I couldn’t bear seeing him so disappointed. I had never seen him like that.”

Together, the twins sorrowed in Mariano’s disappointment. Finally, Lucía’s coach separated them, worried that she wouldn’t be able to focus on her own race. But when the time came, Lucía and her teammate won

their pairs race and later the South American championships, earning the right to compete in the 2004 Olympics.

And just as they had shared sorrow in Mariano’s disappointment, they rejoiced together in Lucía’s success.

“I was so excited when she won the opportunity to compete in the Olympics,” Mariano says. “She earned it.”

With Christ We Can All Win

At the Olympics, Lucía and her teammate ended up ranked 17th. Like Mariano’s results, her finish wasn’t exactly all she had dreamed about. Still, their goals remain high. In the short-term, they want to qualify for an Olympic medal. In the long run, they want to qualify for eternal life.

Both goals will require sacrifice and a willingness to work as one with someone else.

But while the world rewards only one winner (see 1 Corinthians 9:24), no matter how united each team is, the prize the Lord offers can be obtained by all who qualify.

Nephi said that “many of us, *if not all*, may be saved in his kingdom” (2 Nephi 33:12; emphasis added), but we must first “be reconciled unto Christ” (2 Nephi 33:9) by sacrificing our worldly desires in order to follow Him.

The Palermo twins are united in the hope that their faith and sacrifices will be enough to win the one race that matters most of all. ■

