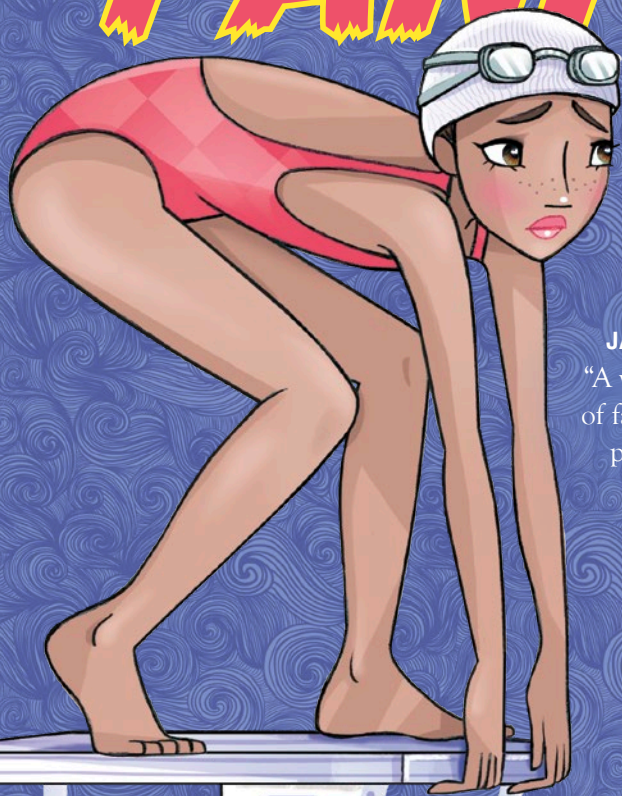


JAKE MADDOX

Pool PANIC



Praise for the
JAKE MADDOX series
“A winning combination
of fast action and intense
personal drama . . .”

— *Booklist*



Pool
PANIC

BY JAKE MADDIX

*text by Leigh McDonald
illustrated by Katie Wood*

STONE ARCH BOOKS
a capstone imprint

Jake Maddox Girl Sports Stories are published by Stone Arch Books
a Capstone imprint
1710 Roe Crest Drive
North Mankato, Minnesota 56003
www.mycapstone.com

Text and illustrations © 2016 Stone Arch Books

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Maddox, Jake, author.
Pool panic / by Jake Maddox ; text by Leigh McDonald ; illustrated
by Katie Wood.
pages cm. - (Jake Maddox girl sports stories)

Summary: Jenny loves swimming, and her best friend has finally convinced her to join the school swim team – but when she is confronted by a crowd of spectators in competition, she freezes up.

ISBN 978-1-4965-2618-2 (library binding) - ISBN 978-1-4965-2620-5 (pbk.)
- ISBN 978-1-4965-2622-9 (ebook pdf)

1. Swimming--Juvenile fiction. 2. Swim teams--Juvenile fiction.
 3. Performance anxiety--Juvenile fiction. 4. Self-confidence--Juvenile fiction.
 5. Teamwork (Sports)--Juvenile fiction. [1. Swimming--Fiction. 2. Anxiety--Fiction. 3. Self-confidence--Fiction. 4. Teamwork (Sports)--Fiction.]
- I. McDonald, Leigh, 1979- author. II. Wood, Katie, 1981- illustrator. III. Title.

PZ7.M25643Pr 2016
813.6--dc23
[Fic]
2015024019

Designer: Kristi Carlson
Production Specialist: Lori Barbeau

Artistic Elements: Shutterstock

Printed in the United States of America in Stevens Point, Wisconsin.
092015 009222WZS16

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Chapter One

SUMMERTIME SWIMMING

“Race you to the pool!” Rachel shouted.

“No running!” Jenny called back.

Jenny smiled as her younger sister Rachel walked as fast as her little legs could go toward the community swimming pool. Sun sparkled on the clear water. It was August, and in just a few days summer would end, and Jenny would be starting sixth grade.

“Hey, Jenny!” a girl shouted.

Jenny looked over to see her friend Maya waving from the deep end. Jenny smiled and waved back at her, then turned to find Rachel. Her little sister was already starting down the steps into the pool.

“Wait up, Rachel!” Jenny shouted. She motioned for Maya to join them in the shallow end. Jenny walked down the steps and let herself slide under the cool water. “Ahhhh,” she said as she popped back up. “I love swimming!”

“Me too,” Maya said, swimming up to her. “In fact, I think I’m going to join the swim team this year.”

“Oh, really?” Jenny asked as she waded through the water toward Rachel.

“Yeah,” Maya said. “It’ll be fun. I mean, we’ve spent all summer in the pool, why not keep it up?”

Jenny frowned. "I don't know," she said. "I love swimming, but I don't like competition. It always makes me nervous."

"But you'd be great," Maya insisted.

"Yeah, you're super fast!" Rachel agreed as she dog-paddled past the two friends.

"Maybe," Jenny said, twisting a strand of wet hair around her finger. "I'll think about it."

"Just don't take too long," Maya cautioned. "School starts next week, and tryouts won't be long after!"

* * *

The girls stayed at the pool all afternoon, swimming until the sun was high in the sky. Rachel sat on the edge of the pool while she ate a snack and kicked her legs in the water. Maya and Jenny floated in the water nearby, talking about what middle school would be like.

Suddenly, Maya stood up in the water and poked Jenny in the ribs. “Race ya!” she shouted, taking off toward the opposite end of the pool.

Jenny laughed and quickly flipped over. She cut through the water with powerful strokes. Soon she caught up to Maya and then easily passed her. Jenny grabbed the wall a couple of seconds before her friend.

Maya came up from the water, grinning. “Ha! See? You have to join the team with me,” she said. “You’re a great swimmer. It would be so much fun!”

Jenny rolled her eyes but smiled. “Okay, fine,” she said. “I guess as long as we do it together, it’ll be fun.”

“Yay!” Maya shouted, giving her a big, wet hug. “Swim team, here we come!”



Chapter Two

TIME FOR TRYOUTS

On Tuesday afternoon, Jenny stood with Maya and several other girls by the side of the school's indoor pool. They were waiting for the swim team tryouts to start. The room echoed with happy chatter, and the smell of chlorine hung in the air.

Jenny adjusted the straps of her new red swimsuit and wiggled her toes on the wet deck. She breathed in and out and tried to settle her nerves.

Maya noticed her fidgeting. She linked her arm through Jenny's. "Don't worry, you've totally got this!" she said.

"We'll see," Jenny replied. She looked around the pool. Everybody was busy talking with their friends. No one seemed to be that competitive, which helped her relax a little.

Just then, a woman in a black swimsuit and track pants came through the door. She picked up the sign-up sheet, quickly looked it over, and then blew her whistle.

"Hi, girls," she said. "I'm Coach Turner. Is everybody's name on this list?" She held up the sheet, and all the girls nodded. "Great, then let's get started. When I call your name, please enter the pool. Swim one length of the pool freestyle, and then come back swimming backstroke. First up, Anna Markham."

A girl in a green swimsuit walked over to the pool, slid into the water, and began swimming along the lane. Jenny noticed that only a few of the other girls were watching. Almost everyone else began whispering to their friends again.

In the water, Anna reached the end of the pool and flipped over onto her back. She swam slowly back toward the group.

“See?” Maya whispered in Jenny’s ear. “It’ll be a piece of cake.”

Anna climbed out of the pool and removed her goggles. Several girls gave her high fives.

“Nice job,” the coach said. “Larissa Johnson, you’re up!”

Jenny watched as girl after girl took her turn in the pool. Then, after the sixth person, the coach finally called out, “Jenny Brown.”

A little butterfly flipped in her stomach, but Jenny walked over to the pool and got into the water. After adjusting her swim cap and pulling down her goggles, she kicked off. Jenny felt calm as she easily moved through the water. It seemed like the other end of the pool was beneath her feet in a flash. Jenny flipped and then backstroked toward the coach with strong, even strokes.

“Very nice!” Coach Turner said when Jenny arrived back at the starting wall. The coach smiled and made a note on the sheet. Some of the other girls clapped.

Jenny pulled herself out of the water with a big grin on her face and hurried back over to Maya. “That was easy!” she exclaimed.

Maya patted her shoulder. “I told you so,” she replied. “You were awesome!”

Jenny blushed. “Thanks,” she said. She liked these girls and the coach. Trying out for the swim team was starting to seem like a pretty good idea after all.

* * *

Two days later, Jenny joined a cluster of kids around the bulletin board in the gym hallway. Team assignments for all of Jackson Middle School’s fall sports had been posted. She found the swimming list and moved closer. Anna Markham . . . Maya Granger . . . Jenny Brown!

Jenny hopped up and down with excitement. She was on the Knights swim team!

JACKSON MIDDLE SCHOOL



Chapter Three

PERFECT PRACTICE

“Hey, Larissa! Hi, Anna!” Jenny called out to her teammates. They turned around and waved her over. Jenny grinned as she jogged up to the cluster of girls already waiting for practice to begin.

It was the Knights’ second week of practice, and Jenny was feeling good about joining the team. All of the girls were really nice, and they’d made her feel so welcome — she hadn’t felt nervous once!

As usual, they would be starting in the gym. They always did some warm-ups and stretching before getting into the water.

“Okay, ladies,” Coach instructed, “let’s start with squats. Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, bend your knees as deeply as you can, and hold your arms straight out in front of you. Let’s do ten.”

Jenny and the other girls spread out and started their warm-up exercises. Once they’d gotten nice and loose, they went to the pool and began their swimming drills.

When her turn was up, Jenny jumped in and swam a 100-yard freestyle course. The team was working on counting their strokes and trying to take fewer, but more powerful, strokes each lap. By her last lap, Jenny was crossing the length of the pool with three fewer strokes than on the first lap.

When Jenny climbed out of the water, Larissa, a swimmer from last year's team, was waiting on the deck for her turn. "Wow, Jenny, your freestyle is really strong!" she said.

"Thanks!" Jenny replied with a smile. She went to sit on the bench as another group of girls ran the drill. Maya came over and plopped down next to her.

"You looked great out there," she said. "You were the fastest in your group, for sure. How many strokes did you cut?"

"Three," Jenny said.

Maya whistled. "Nice!" she said. "Keep swimming like that, and you'll help us win meets for sure!"

* * *

At the end of practice, Coach gathered the girls on the benches.

