

November 7, 2011

News for Swim Parents

Published by The American Swimming Coaches Association 5101 NW 21 Ave., Suite 200 Fort Lauderdale FL 33309

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Thanks, but....

Guy Edson, ASCA Staff and Senior Coach of a Club Team

I received two sets of "Thank you's" from parents on one day a while ago. That's a rare thing in the world of coaching senior swimmers.

One of the "thank you's" was about the care and concern I showed for her child and my continuing efforts to provide a good environment not just for her child, but for all the senior swimmers. Wow, that was deeply appreciated and it immediately elevated me a bit.

A short while later I received another "Thank you" of a different type, but this one left me feeling uncomfortable. This "Thank you" was for the very nice performance his child had at the previous weekend's meet. I was gracious and thanked him but I left many words unsaid.

To thank me for the excellent performance of their child implies that I had something to do with that performance. I am not comfortable being responsible for an athlete's excellent performance. If I accept thanks for a good performance must I then take the grief for a bad performance?

Where is the line of separation in responsibility for a good or bad performance? I see a senior swimmer perhaps as much as 4 hours a day between morning workout, afternoon dryland, and afternoon workout. That leaves 20 other hours a day for the athlete to get behind in their school work, not get enough sleep, not eat right, and throw themselves into all sorts of dramas and high stress situations. And during the 4 hours I am with them, can I make them have perfect starts, strokes, turns, and finishes? No. Can I make them work beyond their perceived ability? No. Every swimmer is responsible for their work ethic. Every swimmer is responsible for becoming a craftsman of their technique. I can stand on the blocks and instruct them to streamline, kick7 dolphin kicks and go 10 meters off of the wall on every freestyle turn... but I cannot make them do that. It is when they chose to do so that they take advantage of the environment I establish.

My job is creating the right environment. Thank me for that. I'll appreciate it.

...but don't thank me for an excellent performance by your child, and don't look to me to be accountable for a lousy performance. Check out those other 20 hours first and then stop by at workout to further determine if your child is taking ownership of their workout performance.

The proper positive relationship between athlete and coach is one where the coach provides the right environment which includes positive feedback when warranted, critical feedback when warranted, instruction when needed, encouragement when needed, challenges, and a level of adversity nearly all the time. The athletes apply themselves and take ownership of their progress.

What's a parent to do? Ask your child if they are taking ownership of their performance and if they don't know what that means – help them understand it. Reinforcement from home is one of the best ways to help your child.