

PICK YOUR



Goal setting. Commitment. Accountability. These three keys unlock every swimmer's potential for success. They may sound obvious and simple, but they are vital. So vital, in fact, that diving into the pool without them is like taking a drive without knowing where you're going.

This was the message Bob Bowman, men's head coach at the University of Michigan, gave the Ann Arbor Swim Club at its awards banquet in Ann Arbor, Mich., recently. Although his words were addressed to that particular group, they ring true for swimmers, parents and coaches of any club. As for their effectiveness, there is no better proof than Bowman's most famous swimmer, Olympic phenom Michael Phelps.

"Every swimmer needs three things to succeed in this sport. Ignoring them prevents athletes from doing what they are capable of," Bowman said. Embracing them, on the other hand, opens doors, overcomes obstacles and helps athletes soar to their full potential.

SET A GOAL

The first key is setting a goal. "Imagine if you got in your car and just started aimlessly driving. That's what not having a goal is like. Goals are the targets that direct your aim," he said.

The end goal is the big question that must be answered first. Where are you headed? Do you want a state cut? An Olympic gold medal? Once you determine your destination point, the other

stops along the way will automatically follow.

"When I sit down with my swimmers at Michigan, I tell them, 'Once you've answered the big question, the small ones are easy. You want to be an NCAA champion? OK, there are some things that go into that. You're not going to miss a practice, ever. Because on that level, everybody trains. You're going to get rested. You're going to eat right, and more.'"

Knowing where to set goals is an art that can be refined with the help of your coaches. Ask them, if you haven't already, because the stakes are high. Goals that are too easy remove the sense of challenge. Goals that are too difficult lead to discouragement. Either extreme produces the same result: swimmers who

