

Critical Factors in Being a Fast Swimmer

It is nice to get back to putting an article together for the parents of our club. I think it is really important that as the head coach we convey to the parents of this club what makes a swimmer a fast/better swimmer. It is also important to help the new parents of this club understand what the direction of our coaching is going to be. Having said that we are going to try and put out a few more articles this year that will help educate the parents and swimmers of our club.

Many people might think that training is the key to competitive swimming success, and in many ways that might be true, but the ultimate success of any program is the stability of that particular swim programs coaching staff. As a swim coach for nearly 20 years now, I have seen several programs fail because they could not maintain a stable coaching staff and have had a “rotating door” of coaches coming in and out of that particular program.

I am proud to say that Sylvania Tsunami has a great coaching staff comprised of six coaches who have a combined coaching history of over 50 years! This experience makes our program unique and in many ways the best staffed program in Northwest Ohio. The experience and background that our staff has is tremendous and it is going to benefit ALL the children of this program now and into the future!

Another factor in developing fast swimmers is the organization of the swim club and its stability. Over the years I have observed a number of programs that have had several coaches in a very short period of time. One program that comes to mind is a team in the west that had 5 head coaches in a 5 years time span, and two of those coaches were within 6 months of one another. I knew two of the coaches in that particular program and respect those coaches a great deal and one of those coaches coached a 2004 US Olympian! However, the individuals on the club board that ran that particular program, and others, put the needs of their children first over the needs of the entire program, and ultimately had those coaches removed from their position as head coach.

I am also very proud to say that the parents who govern Sylvania Tsunami are doing a number of things at every level of this organization that makes our club extremely stable and successful. Our board looks out for the interest of every individual in our program and not just their children. The ability of our board to put the needs of every child first over the needs of their children makes our program extremely stable. This will only benefit each child and will certainly help each child achieve success in the pool.

Coach and Board stability are two key factors in helping athletes achieve every goal they may have, but there are other factors related to activities in the pool that help swimmers become better swimmers too. We are going to briefly discuss seven of them, but please understand that this list could go on and on, and if you have a question about any one of them please ask any of our coaches and I am sure they will be happy to talk to you more about them.

. The factors that seem to be the most important in the success of a swimmer are; technical skills, aerobic base, consistency, courage, patience, responsibility, and having fun.

The first of the factors mentioned that will help a child become a better swimmer are their skills in each of the four competitive strokes. If your child masters all the skills in each of the four strokes your child will be a more balanced an athlete. Our program structure has been established so that each swimmer will receive the appropriate training for the particular group your child may be in and will enable them to become a more balanced athlete. This structure is and has been based on guidelines that were established by the USA Swimming's National Age Group Committee...a committee I served on for almost two years.

Swimmers in our stroke development and red groups are completely focused on the technical skill development for a swimmer and represent the developmental side of our program. Swimmers in our white and blue groups consist of our more advanced age group swimmers who have mastered the skills necessary to become better swimmers...with some additional skill refinement of course! However, these groups also begin to put additional emphasis on training which will help them become faster swimmers in the long-term.

Our senior group represents a group of swimmers who have all the skills necessary to be successful in the pool and are now trying to be the fastest athlete they can be. We have swimmers at almost every level of swimming in our program. Our athletes represent developmental swimmers and national level swimmers. The national level swimmer has to have developed an aerobic base and this comes from extensive training in and out of the pool.

The ability of an athlete to be competitive at the highest levels of competition depends on the aerobic base that has been established over a long period of time, and this begins even at the developmental stages of our program. An aerobic base in simple terms is the ability of an athlete to compete at a high level of exertion and requires time and training to develop. The aerobic base is established through the testing of our athletes and consistent training.

Consistency is another critical factor in an athlete's development. Consistency for an athlete means going to practice, training your best at practice each day, and racing the same way every time you dive into the pool. I am asked quite often how often a swimmer should come to practice. That is a difficult question to answer, but the answer that is given most times is; the more often your child is there, the more opportunities the coaches have to make your child a better swimmer.

You can also look at it from a stand point of grades. In today's society it takes a 90 percent to get an "A" in a class, and it drops ten percent for each letter grade after that. If you want your child to be an "A" level swimmer then they should probably be at 90 percent of the practices. Does that guarantee "A" performances every time? Absolutely

not, because a child could get sick before a meet, they could miss a turn, slip on a start, or any number of things that can cause a bad race. This is especially true for younger swimmers who do not have the experience that a swimmer who has been doing it for a few years has. However, the more consistent an athlete is in their training, and how often a swimmer goes to practice, the more likely they will be to be consistent in competitions.

Consistency in meets, and even practice, is very difficult for a coach to teach a swimmer. This is especially true for young athletes who are new to the sport. However, the more often a child competes in a swim meets, the more familiar they become with the “operations” of a meet and how things work. The bottom line is that over time an athlete who competes and practices more frequently is more likely to see success versus failure. We all fail and we are all nervous when it comes to doing something different or new. The good news is that in time we ALL get better at whatever endeavor we are trying for the first time and I am certain from my experience that it is no different in swimming.

For a swimmer to have success they need to have courage. Courage takes many forms and for an athlete, this means trying new and different things. It is not easy for any of us to do something new. Many times it means getting out of our comfort zone, whatever that particular comfort zone is. For example, most swimmers try to avoid swimming butterfly events. However, I bet that most people didn't know that butterfly is the second most efficient of the swimming strokes. While this stroke is awkward from most swimmers it can be one their best strokes, but learning that stroke along with a number of other things takes patience and ultimately courage to try something different.

How many times have you heard in your life that you need to be patient? Swimming defiantly is a sport that requires patience. That is a lot easier said than done when young athletes want to achieve at something very quickly. Becoming a fast swimmer takes time and the longer you stick with the sport, train on a consistent basis, the more quickly an athlete will be successful. It takes 2 – 3 years of practice before some swimmers begin to see great results. Sometimes it takes longer and sometimes shorter, but in general most athletes take this long to develop the necessary skills to really start to see results in athletic performances. This is especially true for aerobic sports like swimming where the athlete is responsible for his or her success and mastery of technique is so important.

Another critical factor is taking responsibility for your performances. This is true both in the practice and meet venues. To many times parents have said that their child was not being trained correctly, worked to hard, was just not in the mood to swim, or may favorite, I didn't like that event. In my experience this is sometimes the case, but more often times it is something like the athlete was not prepared to perform or does not like a decision a swim coach has made about the advancement of their career. We really are looking out for the athlete, but many times the athlete needs to remember that they are the ones doing the swimming and not the coaches. Also keep in mind that our staff has many years of coaching experience and we most likely know better than anyone else what a child is capable of in the pool. I will finish this comment with an old Chinese proverb. All journeys begin with a first step. We just have to accept what is being asked of us at times and just go out and have fun one step at a time and accept what happens.

That is the final factor that we need to remember about this sport...having FUN! Yes there are going to be times when someone does not feel like swimming, does not want to do a race, or go to practice, but as a staff we are trying to make this sport as fun for all athletes as we can. If the athlete is having fun and learning, what better experience and use of an individual's time can they have in a sport? Yes, fun does not always mean fun and games, but it is what the athlete makes of it during the course of a season. There have been many instances where kids did a hard workout and have come to me afterwards and have said that was fun. Yes...hard work can be fun, but most importantly it is something that when our swim careers are over and look back and say...this was a great experience and I had fun doing it!