

News For SWIM PARENTS

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KIDS IN SPORTS

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Recently I read an article from Sports Psychology magazine, written by Dr. David A. Feigley. He works with the Rutgers University Youth Sport Research Council. The article was entitled "Why Kids Quit" and contained interesting and useful information which I wish to share with all of you.

First, why do kids play sports?

There are three basic types of participants. Ability oriented children enjoy competition and "want to be the best". Task oriented children enjoy the activity itself and often focus on self-improvement. Social approval oriented children work to please others such as coaches, parents, and teammates. To my surprise, the author says that the evidence suggests that those who work for social approval persist the longest.

Children aged six years and younger cannot distinguish between ability and effort. They believe that when they try hard they are automatically good at what they are doing. Praise tends to be accepted positively by very young children regardless of whether the task was successfully completed or not.

Children aged seven through eleven develop the ability to differentiate between having talent and trying hard. They compare themselves with others, and if they feel they cannot succeed, they would rather not try. They find it easier to attribute failure to a deliberate lack of effort, than to admit that they lack ability.

Children from age twelve become skilled at making social comparisons and realize that expending effort is no longer a guarantee that they will succeed.

What can we do to help reduce the pressures that children feel?

1. Encourage enjoyment of the activity and self-improvement.
2. Encourage children to interpret comparisons with others solely as a tool for improving. Comparisons should be constructive and never as simple as "they are better" or "you are not as good".
3. Praise must be an earned reward. As children mature, they begin to value praise for successful outcomes much more than praise for trying hard. Look for specific successes.
4. Continually remind your children that ability often changes dramatically as they mature.

MOVING FROM SUMMER LEAGUE TO YEAR ROUND SWIMMING

“I Have A Nine Year Old Who Has Been Swimming In A Summer League For The Past Three Years. As He Begins Swimming With A Year Round Program, What Things Should Be Emphasized?”

Answered by: Rick Curl, Head Coach of the Curl-Burke Swim Club

I have coached in the summer leagues in the Washington D.C metropolitan area for 18 years. In addition, I worked with the Solotar Swim Club for six years and founded the Curl Swim Club eight years ago.

Each summer many parents get involved in their child's primary activity, such as summer league swimming. Summer leagues are very popular in the Washington, DC area. There are more than 300 teams that are divided into several leagues. When the season ends in August, the local United States Swimming teams will conduct tryouts and give presentations for individuals interested in continuing in a swimming program.

The summer league program is such a short season and each swimmer strives to improve from the past summer. Their main goal is to improve their performances and have a successful season each summer. Also, most parents want children to participate in a healthy activity with intangible benefits offered by a team sport and goal setting.

I feel that it is very important to present a well-rounded program for each age group swimmer. They must enjoy themselves certainly, we all learn more effectively in a pleasant environment. Stroke development is of utmost importance to the young swimmer. They should not be allowed to focus on any one stroke. Long distance training is not necessary in the developing years. Poor stroke habits develop and the boredom of long distance training will most likely have a negative effect on them. A young swimmer must learn proper starts, turns and stroke mechanics so that he or she will develop in many other areas as he progresses and gets older. They will also specialize in a certain area and stroke as they mature.

Parents should encourage their children to be involved in a number of activities. When a youngster devotes too many hours to training each week, he or she will be unable to experience other sports and activities such as music, dance etcetera. I believe that we should give each child the opportunity to be well rounded. Often times, a swimmer will drop out of the sport and not have another activity to fall back on.

Swimmers should be taught and trained in a progressive manner. Each step should include continued stroke development. Other important areas of competitive swimming should be introduced as the swim progresses. If a youngster is having fun while he learns, he will show the greatest amount of improvement.

Parents, throughout the competitive swimming experience hold a vital role in the success of the swimmer. They must continually reinforce the swimmer and support the program and coaching philosophies that they have chosen.

Communication between the parent and coaching staff is important so that a child does not experience conflict and become confused.

Why is Swimming a Year Round Sport?

First, at the competitive level a swimming athlete must train year around just to stay competitive with all the other athletes. Swimming is both conditioning intensive and skill intensive. Strength and endurance conditioning for swimming are not readily transferable from other sports or activities so they must be developed in the pool and in swimming specific dryland exercises. Swimming skills are constantly being developed and refined throughout the swimmer's career.

Not all swimmers are at competitive levels so what is the point in training year around for them? The simple answer is that a good swimming program provides far more than swimming skill development and improvements in strength and endurance — it provides active development of life skills. By “active development” we mean planned — not by accident and not by coincidence. I regularly stop practice to take advantage of teaching moments to demonstrate or discuss a life skill and we plan short 10 minute discussions on a variety of topics. Life skills that are actively promoted by this team include responsibility, self-discipline, work ethic, coping with peer pressure to use drugs, time management, team commitment and loyalty, lifetime fitness, nutrition, setting and meeting goals, learning to extend themselves, challenges, cooperation, and goal setting.

We know through research that sport in and of itself does not build character or life skills. These skills are developed by the influence of role models, the environment, and through a systematic, planned process. The organized participation in workouts, competitions, travel, community events etc enhances the children's own abilities and strengths as well as teaches them how to cope with their weaknesses and better themselves. The Kona Dolphin Swim Club, as well as many other teams nationwide, strives to provide a positive, disciplined environment all year round for children to learn life skill via the sport of swimming. We believe this is the most compelling reason to keep your child in the water all year around.

Now, having said that, is there room for other sports and other activities? As long as children aren't being over scheduled we think YES! We encourage the children to be in other sports and other activities. Many of our swimmers regularly participate in a variety of activities including soccer, basketball, piano and music lessons, art classes, martial arts, dance and theater, etc.

The bottom line is that this swimming program is a healthy and wholesome activity available all year around for your children and we encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity. Mahalo Nui Loa.

Success in Athletics

Many parents wonder what differentiates the great athlete from the average one, and whether their kids have what it takes to be great athletes. We'll let Dr. Jack Daniels, an exercise physiologist at State University of New York at Cortland, and an influential figure in developing the U.S. Swimming Sports Medicine Program, enlighten us.

"There are really only four ingredients for success in athletics. One is genetic ability. Some genetic differences are easy to see (7-foot-plus Kareem Abdul Jabbar's basketball endowments), while others are physiological and internal differences that can't be seen. In America we have a hard time accepting those differences and we think that everyone who trains hard enough can be a champion.

The second thing besides genetic ability is intrinsic motivation. If you have a seven-footer and the coach wants him to play baseball, but he wants to be an artist, you won't get too much basketball out of him.

The third ingredient is opportunity - providing our athletes with good facilities, good weather, and competition against good athletes.

The final ingredient is direction. Direction means a good coach and a good program to follow.

Direction is the area where parents and coaches really have an opportunity to help the athlete. With the fragmented nature of our national swimming community, we have to put aside our personal concerns and desires and focus our efforts on helping our athletes attain their potential. Here is the part age group coaches can play:

- * Teaching outstanding biomechanics to build the base for all future swimming successes and fulfillment. Stroke education in both learn-to-swim, novice, and advanced age group programs must be primary.

- * Teaching values that reflect the best of our sport. Swimmers must be educated in their own careers, positive image building of themselves as athletes and people, and on their part in the national swimming effort. Values and attitudes again shape the future for our sport.

- * Provide the aerobic training base from which science tells us great athletes develop.

- * Educate parents, our athletes' primary support system, to the needs of their athletes. Swimming careers are lifelong pursuits, and parents of young athletes need a vision of the rewards attainable by their youngster.

The high school coach can also contribute by recognizing the needs of both the elite and developing athlete in their programs, and by instilling in their athletes the knowledge that good swimming demands near year-round participation in YMCA, USS, or community programs. The high school coach also needs to cooperate with the club coach to ensure a coherent individual training and competition schedule for each athlete."