

Valley Area Swim Team Confidence

Confidence - an essential ingredient in the recipe of success

Yes it is true; you cannot go out and buy confidence, if only we could. Confidence is gained through a very complex process of learning, experiencing, failing, bouncing back, planning and most of all experiencing success.

We can see that confidence has a lot to do with each of us and how we process our experiences and grow in a positive direction. It has a lot to do with how we react and process what is happening to us as we go about training and competing. Outside influences also affect us and our confidence too. It is always important to be aware of the other things going on in your life and how they might affect your performances as an athlete.

Everyone, even the most confident, will approach a major event whether it is an exam at school, a presentation, a marriage ceremony or a track competition with some butterflies in their stomach. If they did not I would be concerned. However, it is the confident athlete who can handle the butterflies and channel the nervous energy into a positive performance. This is a learned practice and the sooner each athlete tries to be more positive and focused in their preparations, the sooner their confidence will build.

What are some things they can do starting now?

Being able to achieve improved focus and confidence will translate into an ideal performance so let us review some steps athletes can take to help them overcome their butterflies and build their confidence.

1. Use positive thoughts and spoken word. The more positively you think and speak, the more likely you are to shape yourself into a positive person. This takes strong will and concentration to stop you from repeating lifelong habits of thinking negatively or selling yourself short. Work at it!
2. Examine your life. Are there things going on that are affecting how you feel in a negative way? If so do what you can to eliminate or change what is happening.
3. Nothing can perk me up more than going over what I have accomplished, from where I was at the beginning to where I am now. This can lift my spirits when I realize what I have achieved.
4. Reach out. By becoming an outward going person you begin to attract attention. You become someone who people gravitate to. You become seen as a leader and a role model. What a confidence booster.
5. Follow your convictions and beliefs. If you have thoughts and points of view, do not be afraid to express them. People then are clear as to where you stand on issues. You then are seen as someone with passion, ideals, and strong ambition. Again you are seen as a role model and this is just great for your confidence.
6. Do not let what others say or do have any affect on your beliefs or goals. If someone tries to tell you that you cannot do something, go out and do it to show them that your individuality is determined by your beliefs not theirs.

How to improve performance

Focus on the process - not on outcomes. This is easier said than done. As a society we are brainwashed into focusing on who wins and thus if you do not win you are a loser. You may be able to focus on the process, but can your parents? Many times I have heard a parent scold their child because someone beat them or they did not have a good race (in their mind). Ignore any of this and remember points 5 and 6 above.

As part of your planning actually carry out some of the necessary preparations you will need to do like getting enough sleep, eating well at the right times and doing other things to keep you motivated and focused on the positive.

Learn skills to control your emotions and feelings

Think about your race and see yourself performing well. Be focused. One of the best ways to avoid succumbing to negative emotions or feelings is to be focused on the task. You have planned everything from the time you get to the pool until your race. Stay focused and stick to your plan. It is not a time to renew your friendships and be a social butterfly. Do that later. Go over and over in your mind your strategies and tactics and continue to reinforce your positive attitude during your preparations.

Make sure you are aware of what you planned to do and make every effort to change those behaviors and mistakes. This is called analyzing the process and doing what you need to do to improve it in the future.

Race strategies

Finally you need to have an idea of how you are going to race. When the gun goes off are you going to aimlessly drift along with the other competitors, or are going to really get into it and run to the best of your ability? You have already developed in your mind many race strategies and scenarios. This will have helped you be mentally ready for almost any eventuality but remain focused and continually re-evaluate the race as it unfolds. A lot will depend on the tactics employed by the other swimmers. It is how you deal with their tactics and how you dictate your statement of how you are going to race that will determine how successful you will be. Stick to your plan if you think it will work. If the race unfolds differently than you expected modify your strategies accordingly. The main point is to work hard from the start and challenge for the lead or your personal best at the right time. Leave nothing on the track at the end. Give it your all.

And finally

I hope the above points will help you in your preparations. Most of it will be a lifelong process for you. I hope by continually striving to master the 'mental' aspects of performance you will gain confidence to go with your superior physical condition through the months of training you have done. But confidence comes from within and everyone can have it if they want it.