

"Eliminate Your Competition"

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Here are some short vignettes of parent--coach interactions I have collected over the past couple of months at meets I have attended with my own team as well as observations other teams here in South Florida.

- Early in the morning before the meet warm-up a coach, holding one corner of the shade canopy and trying to both direct a hand full of helpful swimmers and negotiate around the corner of the bleacher is suddenly replaced by a crew of parents telling him, "You and the swimmers have more important things to do. We will take care of this."
- During a passing rain shower hitting in the middle of the 400 freestyles, a parent stands by the coach with umbrella in hand so the coach can watch and take splits in relative dryness.
- In the finals' heat sheets the coach discovers that one of his swimmers is seeded two seconds faster than she actually swam in prelims and the erroneous time is a JO qualifying time. After talking to meet management he finds out that there was a "timing error" and the meet management felt the results were fair and were not going to change them. He explains the situation to the dad of the swimmer and before the coach has a chance to say that the child has to truly make the time standard, the dad beats the coach to the thought saying, "she has to earn it by doing it."
- Most everyone has left at the end of prelims except officials, timers, a few coaches and swimmers preparing for a couple of heats of 1500's. During the short break the coach reviews splits and strategies with his swimmers and doesn't have time to leave the deck. A parent brings him a cold soda and a sandwich from the concession stand.
- After finals a group of parents clean up the area they had occupied that day leaving it cleaner than they had found it.
- A swimmer who qualifies 9th and fails to make finals is comforted and reassured by the dad who then, without comment on the swim, directs the swimmer to speak with the coach.
- A parent sincerely asks if the coaching staff can do a private lesson to fix his son's butterfly. The coach said that he didn't believe he needed a private lesson, but just needed to apply what the staff is saying to him in practice every day. Before the 50 fly event the coach reminds the boy, with the parent present, to get his head and chest down, hips up, and to stretch the entry before beginning the stroke in order to allow the hips time to get up. In the event the swimmer dives in and swims uphill butterfly the entire way. The coach explains to the parent that every day the staff reminds the swimmer about proper timing and body position in the water and he sometimes tunes in and does it but more often doesn't. When the swimmer returns from the swim for post race analysis the coach asks the swimmer if he thought at all about his hips up and he said "no." The parent then says to his son, "Sounds like you just need to pay more attention in practice."

- A swimmer who has noticeably struggled all meet long has one last chance to make finals and all parents stand up to cheer the swimmer on. (He makes finals.)
- On the last day of a three day meet, a swimmer -- who has had an exceptionally good meet and made several qualifying times the previous two days but is noticeably tired -- makes the final of one event on the last night. It is an inconsequential event for the athlete and there is no team scoring involved. The coach recommends that the swimmer scratch finals and go home early to get some rest. The dad is fully supportive.
- Due to a ton of scratches, a young swimmer is moved all the way up to first alternate and this would be his first chance at a final. He is excited about the opportunity to swim again. Even though his best time is far behind the other qualifiers his parents are also enthusiastic about bringing him back for a chance at swimming in finals. However, there are no scratches and the boy is unable to swim and is noticeably disappointed. His parents hug him and reassure him that his time will come and they stay for the rest of finals to watch and cheer for the other swimmers.

...All good examples of wonderful parent support.

So, where does the title "Eliminate the Competition" come from? It comes from another vignette:

- During the 400 freestyles in a qualifying meet, a 12 year old swimmer who I had just finished going over the pre-race strategy with the coach, was pulled aside on his way to the blocks by the dad who told him to "eliminate the competition" on the first 200 so that he would have an "easy time of it" on the second 200. This may be an acceptable business strategy but not so good in the 400 free. The boy tried to do as the dad said and did indeed go out fast but failed badly on the second half of the swim and missed a qualifying time substantially. The dad stormed out of the natatorium without talking to his son or the coach.

I was going to write an article about this situation and what might have been a more appropriate chain of events but then I starting thinking of all the good things parents do at swim meets and I decided to focus an article on the positive instead, *because the positive parent behaviors far outweigh the negative behaviors*. We coaches thank all of you parents who model such good choices for your children and the team.