

Long Term Development Plan and Swim Meets

To ensure that athletes have longevity in the sport and the greatest opportunity for success the coaches follow a long-term development plan (articles in the future will explain this plan in more detail).

This plan takes many things into consideration:

1. The different stages of development that athletes go through both mentally and physically
2. The training that is appropriate at these stages of development
3. The competitions that are appropriate at these stages of development

Athletes starting from a young age must develop certain competitive skills that will help them achieve success throughout their development and these fit into four categories:

1. Technical Skills
2. Tactical Skills
3. Mental Skills
4. Physical Skills

When developing a meet schedule all of the above determine what meets we go to, the frequency of meets and the events that athletes will swim at each meet.

1. Technical Skills – Through different stages of development athletes will develop different strengths and these cannot be foreseen therefore an athlete must develop technical skills for each stroke and each event distance so that they do not let an opportunity for success escape them.

A great example of this is Katie Bell. When I first started coaching Katie she never swam breaststroke because of a knee injury she suffered from skiing and her best stroke was backstroke. Once we addressed her knee issue she became a National level breaststroker.

Because of this fact athletes will be entered into each one of the 13 Olympic events at different points in the year.

2. Tactical Skills – For athletes to learn to perform at their best they must learn a variety of tactical skills. Once again because their strengths will change with their development their ideal tactical strategies will change as well.

At meets athletes will be asked to swim events in different ways so that they give themselves the ability to construct races in a variety of ways.

3. Mental Skills – There are many different mental skills that athletes must develop to be successful at meets during their career. Such skills as goal setting, relaxation, activation, confidence and self-talk are just a few.

When developing these skills athletes will learn to use them when competing in meets that they are very comfortable at, once these skills are developed the best way to test them are to put athletes into challenging and potentially stressful situations so that they are able to use their mental skills to cope with adversity.

Which as we all know is not only an extremely valuable skill in sport, but it is also one of the most valuable skills in life.

4. Physical Skills – For athletes to be successful at the different levels of competition they must learn how to sustain their energy during a these competitions. To be able to do this we attend different meets that are of different lengths so that the athletes can train their bodies to deal with the demands of meets that last multiple days and multiple sessions.

Annual Plan and Swim Meets

Each year the coaching staff puts together an annual plan for the athletes. This plan is based off of the long-term development plan ensuring that athletes are both receiving the proper training for their different stages of development and learning the different skills in a systematic order.

The annual plan is broken into three different cycles – September-December, December-March and March-July. For each one of these cycles there is a peak meet that all of the athletes training is centered around so that they have the greatest opportunity to achieve success. Once developing a base of training and being able to perform their newly developed skill consistently.

It is critical for the athletes' long-term development and their motivation that they attend these meets so that they have the greatest opportunity for success and different learning experiences.

The competitions leading up these peak meets are also chosen so that the athletes can achieve maximum success at these peak meets.

Take for example our peak meet for December – The Christmas Cracker. This meet is a three-day competition with heats and finals and is a great meet to prepare athletes to compete in both AAA and AA Provincial Championships because those meets are structured in the same manner.

Leading up to this meet we have the VPSC Invitational. This meet is a great meet to start the year with. Athletes have the opportunity to swim all strokes and a great number of events so that they can develop newly learned technical, tactical and mental skills.

Our next meet is the Langley Olympians Invitational. This meet is a two-day heats and finals meet where the athletes can train both their physical and mental skills in a longer and more challenging event.

Why this meet is so important is because if they are to excel at their peak meet they will have to have experience swimming in heats and finals so that they can test their physical and mental preparation, because of the length of the sessions.

Finally we get to the Christmas Cracker where the athletes are optimally prepared to swim at their best because of the development of different skills throughout the season.

I hope that this gives parents a greater understanding of how different competitions are used to develop skills and why different competition are so important to attend if we want to give the athletes the greatest chance to achieve success.