

# Fall 2022 Age Group Parent Meeting Notes

## August 28, 2022



### General Philosophy & Vision

The youth swimming world is generally divided into two main groups: age group swimming, which is generally considered those swimmers who have not yet entered high school, and senior swimming, which is typically those swimmers in high school and older.

Within those boundaries there is some variation – you may have a swimmer who at thirteen is very advanced for their age and has the physical ability and emotional maturity to train with older athletes, and you may have another swimmer who came to the sport late or is on a later developmental track physically, who is 14 and not quite ready to train at a higher level.

At Gator Swim Club, we generally follow this split, with Coach John taking charge of the Senior athletes and general management of the team, while Coach Erin supervises and coaches mainly the 14 and under athletes in our Age Group program.

### Age Group Program Goals & Objectives:

- ***Main goal: Prepare our swimmers to compete at a high level in high school and beyond.***
- ***Long term vision: To develop athletes that are primed and ready to be the best senior swimmers that they can be.*** If we happen to develop excellence and speed at a younger age, that's fantastic, but it is not the main focus.
- To achieve these objectives, we must prepare our swimmers to compete in every stroke and at every distance.
  - Swimmers that can excel at the 400 individual medley and the 200 and 500 freestyles when they are in high school are the swimmers that can, as they get older, specialize down to shorter distances, up to longer distances, or adapt to any stroke when they go to college.

- Swimmers that can swim all these events well have longer careers, experience less burn out, and are more recruitable to college programs than swimmers that specialize when they are too young.
- Being able to take on a diverse schedule of events, and being able to switch training between strokes and distances also keeps swimming fresh and fun.
- The more opportunities we can provide for our swimmers to improve, and the more interesting we can keep the sport, the more likely our athletes are going to want to enjoy it and want to stick with it, even when it gets hard.
- Excellent technique is the foundation upon which good swimming is built. Our age group swimmers spend a significant portion on their time working on skills and drills to hone their technique.
- We also spend a significant amount of time kicking. Swimming is becoming an increasingly leg-driven stroke.
- Building a strong and efficient kick is vital to the development of strong and efficient swimming.

### **Group Structure & Move Up Assessment**

- ***We tend to be rather conservative when making move up decisions***, because we want to be sure that the swimmers are prepared to be challenged AND successful in their next level group.
- Although we expect swimmers to be capable of dealing with challenges, if a swimmer is moved up too soon, they may struggle too much, which can lead to burn out, injury, or even worse, wanting to leave the sport.
- The last thing we want to do to a swimmer is move them up too soon and then have to move them back to their old group. Psychologically that is too difficult for most swimmers to handle, and does not lead to a good outcome for the swimmer.
- ***Move up assessments are multi-factorial***. We take into account age, physical, emotional, and psychological development, skill level, and meet and practice achievements.
  - There is not one single standard or achievement that will move a swimmer up or hold a swimmer back.

- Typically swimmers that are ready to move up to the next level group share certain characteristics:
  - (1) ***Swimmers that are ready to move up are typically maxed out in the amount and quality of work that they are doing in their current group.*** They are leading or close to leading lanes in multiple strokes and for a majority of sets. They are making all or most of the intervals for the group. They are coming to the majority of offered practices, and, if applicable, are going to meets and excelling at swimming longer events, and in multiple strokes.

For example, a Blue group swimmer who is looking to move to the Orange group will have to be able to handle 90 minute to two hour-long practices, whereas all the practices that they currently do are 60 minutes. If they struggle to complete sets or maintain their technique at the end of 60 minutes, we would not expect them to be able to thrive in a practice environment where they are being asked to do even harder sets over a period of time that is 50% longer. A Blue group swimmer who comes 4-5 nights per week and can maintain their technique and speed for all of that time is much more likely to be successful in dealing with the demands of the Orange group at the next level.

- (2) ***We expect that swimmers that move up will be able to make the basic intervals and execute the basic skills of the next level group.***

For example, in White group we expect swimmers to still be working on executing flip turns consistently, but flip turns are expected to be done all the time without reminders in the Green group. A swimmer in White who is shaky on their flip turns is not ready for Green group.

A swimmer that is looking to move to Gold group from Silver will typically be able to make the basic training intervals for the Gold in both kick and swim sets. If they typically fall behind or struggle with intervals in the Silver group, they are not ready for the increased speed and work load that is expected of swimmers in the Gold group.

## 2022-2023 Short Course Season Goals

- COVID hit our age group program especially hard, and our numbers, both in general and in terms of qualifying for upper level meets are down from where they were before the pandemic.
- Our goal this season is to increase these numbers enough to field relays of individual qualifiers for boys and girls in every age group at both of these meets.
- In order to be able to achieve these goals, we need more swimmers to go to more meets! A swimmer cannot qualify for a higher level, end-of-season meet if they do not attend regular, in-season meets.
- We generally try to schedule one meet per month, and try to go to as many local or semi-local (Ocala) meets as we can.
- We understand that away meets are an expense and a burden on families, but simply due to where we are located in the state, by necessity we will go to some meets each season that will require families to travel.
- Typically as a swimmer progresses higher up in the club, our expectations for their meet attendance will go up.

## Details & Execution

Successful age group swimming requires swimmers, coaches, and parents to all be on the same page and committed to the same things. There are several different parts of that three-pronged relationship that I want to highlight here. Think of the relationships among swimmers, coaches, and parents as a stool with three legs – all three legs need to be doing their job or else everything will collapse.

### **For the Swimmer:**

- ***Swimmers swim.***
- The most important thing that we expect of our swimmers is a willingness to work hard and respect the hard work of their teammates, coaches and parents.
  - Respect for our teammates is paramount.
  - We want Gator Swim Club to be a place where everyone feels safe and welcome.
  - We expect swimmers to support one another, to cheer for each other, and to be kind to their teammates.

- We expect our swimmers to listen to and do what their coaches ask them to do, to the best of their ability.
- Part of being able to work hard is being prepared. We expect our swimmers to be ready to swim when they come to practice.
  - They need all of their required gear at every practice – we plan and write our workouts based on the equipment that the swimmer needs for their group.
  - When a swimmer is missing something, it can delay or disrupt the workout for everyone.
  - Swimmers should have their own set of equipment. We have some extra kickboards, fins, and pull buoys for when something breaks or goes missing, but they should be relied on only in case of emergency.
  - Swimmers that are missing equipment are not going to get the full benefit of the practice that the coaches have prepared.

#### **For the Coach:**

- ***Coaches coach.***
- Preparation and hard work are also vital for the coaching staff.
  - We start each season with a plan for every practice, every day of that season already planned – we know the focus, the yardage, and the skills we will cover.
  - Coaches come to practice with workouts prepared every day, and ready to do the best that they can to encourage, inspire, and help each swimmer to do their best at practice.
- We are committed to doing everything we can to reach every swimmer in the pool every day.
  - The role of a coach is a varied and delicate balance between teaching, supporting, encouraging, and challenging their athletes.
  - We try to be tough but fair, and always to provide constructive feedback and enthusiastic support for our swimmers.

#### **For the Parent:**

- ***Parents parent.***
- Parents should avoid advising their swimmer on technique and training beyond asking them to work hard and have fun.

- Preparation and hard work are essential on the part of the parent as well.
  - For swimmers to succeed, it is essential, first and foremost, that they come to practice as much as they can.
  - Attendance is the best predictor of improvement, especially at the age group level.
  - We understand that it can be difficult for families with multiple kids on different schedules to get here every day, but we ask that you do the best that you can.
  - We can't have expectations for our athletes that don't match the level of commitment that a family has to the sport.
  - A big part of attendance is **punctuality**.
    - We expect our swimmers to be on deck, suited, capped, and ready to go when practice begins.
    - Since none of our age groupers can drive, that is, in large part, on you as parents to help us and them with.
    - When swimmers arrive late, not only do they not get the full benefit of the practice, they often are disruptive to the remainder of the group, which is not fair to the swimmers, coaches, and parents who were on time.
- Communication with coaches and with your swimmers is also important for parents.
  - We ask that you keep on top of your email, where we notify you of scheduling issues, meets, and other information.
  - If there is a problem, we ask that you communicate with us as soon as possible so that we can address it right away.
    - Sometimes swimmers are hesitant to bring up issues with their coaches, but they will talk to you about them. If there is something going on with their swimming, with their teammates, or with the coaching that they are receiving, please let us know so that we can address it as quickly as possible.