



(Taken from T2 Head Coach's Blog "Developing The Champion Within")

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2010

### An Open Letter to T2 Aquatics Parents:

We had a great start to our T2 Aquatics season at the "Friday Night at the Races" Meet last night. Parents, thank you so much for your support.

As a brief introduction to this post: for the last 15 years, I have spent over 5,000 days on deck coaching either at meets or practices. I have a unique perspective on the sport given that fact –and although I do not have children of my own I have seen hundreds of kids and thousands of parents through their swimming careers. I've witnessed many lows and quite a few high points. I'd like to share with you some of the things I've learned about swimming, expectations, and attitude.

At times I am asked by parents, "How do I handle X situation at a swim meet?" Generally this question is geared toward the idea that the parent would like to help their child who may not be having a great meet or a great experience – or possibly they've been DQed in a race or missed their event. Often, when meets are going well for a swimmer – the swimmer is happy; and when meets are not going well a swimmer may tend to become upset. Feeling too far "up and down" is something we'd like to minimize in an athletic environment. We'd like to stay "even keel".

Here are a few tips we (parents and coaches) can all use as we approach competitive situations. These tips will help us maintain perspective – and stay "even keel".

**#1 – Love is primary.** A child needs love and a caring attitude from the adults in his/her life. When in doubt, offer support. "How can I help?" is a great question to ask an upset athlete – it puts you in a position where you are offering love and support, while it simultaneously shields you from having to solve your kid's issue right there on the spot. The coaches are there to figure out the solution either at that particular meet, or in practice leading into the next meet.

**#2 – Laugh.** If you are having fun and treating the "Swim Meet" experience with a light heart, so will your kids. It's kind of the same for the coaches. The athletes will mirror the adults in their life, in particular in times of stress!

I witnessed one of our eight and unders get disqualified last night because she swam the incorrect stroke for the first few strokes. She caught herself, corrected herself, and finished the race. Her dad was in attendance at the meet, and did the perfect thing after the race – he smiled and greeted his daughter with love. Not only will this swimmer continue to learn and love swimming due to this light attitude, but the bond between the child and the parent will strengthen due to the simple act of love and acceptance.

If the child picks up on a sense that their parent is upset after a race (or nervous or overly-concerned going into a race), they will pick up on it – and after a while they will become conscious of it. Nervousness and concern with how your child may do is normal, and it's inside every parent at times – but the best skill you can have is the ability to relax and be yourself, for the benefit of the long term development of the athlete.

**#3 – Exercise wisdom regarding the long term nature of our sport.** Many parents who are new to the sport see the sport of swimming through a different lens than I do. I have learned to relax at meets and understand that meets simply won't go perfectly. When a swimmer doesn't have a great swim or a great meet, I automatically start thinking about the next swim or the next meet. The learning process is the key -- an athlete's ability to deal with disappointment and come back stronger through hard work and commitment is a great skill to have in any area of life. Getting through disappointment in a positive way is more important than going a 27.8 in a 50 freestyle.

So, if your child doesn't have a great meet, use the disappointment they may have as a way to help teach persistence and determination. What a great opportunity for you to show support and teach at the same time! You can bet that our coaching staff at T2 is planning for the next meet with persistence and determination – because we take our jobs seriously, and we want everyone on our team to be wildly successful in the sport of swimming.

**#4 – Be cool in times of success.** If your child has a great swim or a great meet, it's ok to say "great job" and feel genuine happiness for him/her. It's ok to show a little excitement too at times, but your ability to temper your excitement goes a long way when things don't go perfectly. How do you act when things aren't going well? That's

the hard part of competition for coaches and parents alike. If you don't get too "up" while the swimmer is having a successful meet – then you won't have to "fix everything" when your child has a disappointing meet. Staying cool is a great strategy because there is NO WAY any swimmer will have all good meets, or all terrible meets. In one year of swimming at meets just about every swimmer will have each of these: a great meet, a poor meet, and a so-so meet. Count on it, be ready to handle it – and treat them all the same.

**#5** – Understand how meet entries work, and how "things go" at meets. I can't remember the last time I was at a meet where everyone was entered in their exact best times, in the correct heats, and everybody made it behind the blocks on time – with no issues or problems. Sometimes there are issues we can correct as coaches, but due to the fact that we like to play by the rules there are just some things we cannot correct – and simply have to roll with.

Last night we had a female athlete who had to race with the boys, a 10 year old who was mistakenly put into the Open age group, and we had at least one swimmer miss an event. In each instance I witnessed parents acting out of love, support, and sportsmanship in regards to their athlete – and toward the coaches as well. Thank you for that, as we are doing the best we can to do a great job with your kids, and want the best for them as you do.

**#6** – Point out positive behavior, instead of certain times or event places. I don't know how many times I've heard a kid talk to me about their event times, when there are 10 other things that are more important at that stage in their development. When swimmers are simply going for best times, they tend to scramble and try too hard -- and it's that "trying too hard" that really gets them in trouble in the water. Generally kids who really "get after it" in a race function in a counterproductive way -- due to the fact that their "trying" tends to lead to greater water turbulence, and a lot of turbulence leads to drag and slower swimming. Great times will come and go, and are difficult to control (if times were easy to control we'd all do best times every time). So we can't get into praising times. Praise intent, praise preparation, praise the fact that the swimmer raced and didn't give up on their swim. Praise breaking through fear. Praise thinking big.

By praising behavior traits instead of concrete results, we are praising things that the child (athlete) can control – and by encouraging them to control positive behavior traits, we encourage them to repeat those traits, and in doing so we can lead them to achieve higher levels of performance, through functionally constructive behavior.

It is part of our Mission Statement at T2 Aquatics to offer quality education to parents. I hope this helps you at meets and at home when faced with the task of raising your kids in a competitive swimming environment. Thanks again for your support, and for showing that support to your children last night at our first meet of the year -- it was a great success!