

SWIMMING AND COOL WEATHER

A Message from Seminole Aquatics Head Coach Tony Ackerson

When I was a young boy living in New Hampshire in the winter, my mother would wrap me up in several thermal layers of various fabrics before I went outside. Part of the ritual always involved her putting plastic bags over my multiple layers of socks, just to keep the melted snow from getting my feet wet. By the time I'd finally go outside to play in these sub-arctic conditions, I could barely play at all, due to all of the clothing my mother had packed me in. The Apollo lunar astronauts of that era looked more mobile than I did.

It was miserably, bitterly cold back then. But I still went out and played. All of us did. That's the real point I want to make here.

We've had an unseasonably warm summer and fall these past few months, and most nights on the pool deck, we're still wearing short-sleeved shirts to coach in, even in late November. But as we start to approach---finally--- some stretches of cooler weather as we approach the New Year, I wanted to make a few quick points about winter swimming.

1. **Cold weather by itself does not cause the common cold.** Being exposed to people suffering from the common cold can cause us to become sick. But simply being exposed to cooler air temperatures does not.

For swimmers, this should be taken a step further: Being **wet**, in colder weather, doesn't cause someone to become infected with the common cold virus. If this were true, USA Swimming would be forced to have swimming become a spring and summer-only sport. Time standards would have to be adjusted, as people in the warmer climates would have all of the advantages in terms of increased training time. Physicians would take out Public Service Addresses on radio and TV urging parents to keep their children dry during the winter months. Taking this silliness to an even lower level, doctors might urge their patients not to allow their children to even **BATHE** during the winter, for fear that the children would become stricken with colds, due to the cooler air temperatures in some homes.

2. **Serious swimmers all over the world train year-round.** If you've ever spoken to me, or studied our website, you'll know that I'm a big proponent of kids (particularly our younger kids) coming to as many practices as they want to, but nothing more. However with the older kids on the team, we make it clear that if they want to eventually develop into high school and possibly collegiate swimmers, it's a twelve month commitment. At the highest levels in the sport, there really is no off-season. We're fond of the old saying, "When you're not practicing, your opponent probably is."

Every team, ours included, has a few kids that take a few months off each year. What is always striking to me is the difference when they return. Usually, there will be another swimmer that they were buddies with, and maybe they even shared a lane. They were training partners. And they were close to the same speed when the one child took the winter off. Well, when the child comes back, there's often a big difference between the child and his or her buddy.

Don't get me wrong. Some kids NEED a break, and want a break. Their swimming "career" isn't over just because they take a few months off here and there when they're seven years old. But it can be frustrating to a little kid that is away for a few months, only to return and feel light-years slower than when he left, when the group he used to be competitive in is now leaving him behind. That's tough to take at any age.

3. **The water at our facility is just about ALWAYS warm.** We keep it at 80-81 degrees during the warmer months, but we bump it up a little in the winter, specifically thinking of our younger swimmers. It's routinely set at 81-82 degrees every afternoon, and we'll keep it there through March. There are always a handful of days each year where the overnight temperature dips below freezing, and on those days, the water drops a bit as well, as the heaters struggle to keep up with daytime highs that might just reach 40 degrees. On these types of days, if our water is ever below 79 degrees, or if the weather is just miserable, we will usually cancel the younger kids' workout.

Try to remember on the upcoming winter nights, when you watch your kids disappearing into a fog over the pool as they practice, that they're a lot more comfortable than you are. And they're probably going to suffer from the cold weather more when they walk to the bus stop than they will from being at swim practice. In terms of staying warm after practice on a cold day, the swim parkas are the greatest. You can get them with our team logo by calling Total Team Wares in Longwood (407-644-1333). Just ask for Bart, the owner.

Some of the best memories of swimming involve practicing on the coldest days. It feels good being in the pool when you know other kids are staying home. It's fun to have people that don't understand swimming shake their heads when they hear about practicing on a cold day. Our high school swimmers take a lot of pride in being the only team that practices in bad weather, when all of the other sports cancel their workouts. If your child is enjoying being on the team, and is excited about swimming, please don't allow the winter weather to curtail their involvement in this great sport. Thanks.

Oh, and if you ever visit New Hampshire in the winter, you'll understand why I live in Florida.

Tony Ackerson
Seminole Aquatics