

The High School – Swimming Club Relationship (11/1/2004)



*In cooperation with the National Interscholastic Coaches Association (NISCA) and the American Swimming Coaches Association (ASCA), USA Swimming is very pleased to endorse and to facilitate the distribution of the following article “**The High School – Swimming Club Relationship in American Swimming.**”*

During the 2003-2004 school year, over 240,000 student-athletes participated in high school swimming programs in the USA. Over that same time period, 270,000 young people participated in USA Swimming club programs. Many of these athletes swam with both their high school and club teams. These swimmers receive many positive benefits from both programs and their overall swimming experience is meaningfully impacted in a variety of ways by those collective experiences.

It is very, very important that our high school and club programs work together with mutual cooperation and respect with the primary focus being the best interests of the athlete that they oftentimes share. Coach Block’s article addresses this relationship, makes suggestions on how coaches can work together and provides examples of where and how this relationship has been very successful. We commend Coach Block for his in-depth look at this critically important component to the long-term success of American Swimming and heartily encourage our club coaches to take to heart and support the message that is offered.

*Pat Hogan
Club Development Director*

Part 1 – A Philosophy of Collaboration

Introduction

The history of the High School – Club relationship in the United States is as high as George Haines at Santa Clara High School and the Santa Clara Swim Club, and as low as Renee Magee (Houston, TX) being disqualified from her high school State Championship for traveling out of state to compete with the US Olympic Team.

The revisions to the Amateur Sports Act give clear direction to all organizations involved in the development of young athletes that it is our obligation to coordinate our efforts and respect the rights of all athletes to participate in all programs for which they may be eligible to participate.

Stated simply, the Congress of the United States requires high schools to allow athletes to participate in NGB certified club and developmental programs, and it requires clubs to place no impediment on athletes wishing to participate in interscholastic competition.

As we enter the 21st century, with a new “Olympic and Amateur Sports Act” as guidance, NISCA, ASCA and USA Swimming are working together to develop guidelines for collaboration between club and high school programs. This paper is a result of that effort.

The High School – Club Relationship

It is arguable that high school swimming is the cornerstone in the success of American Swimming. Second only in importance to high school swimming is the relationship between the local high school team and the community swimming club.

The largest percentage of pools used by swimming clubs are those built by local school systems. Access to these facilities is essential to the health of the club system and American Swimming as a whole.

In the ideal relationship, high school and club swimming are mutually reinforcing, supporting each other from both above and below. The high school team (or school district) supports club swimming by providing informational access to young students in the school system and by providing the exciting, dual meet oriented competitions during the years when short-term goals are most critical. The high school athletics experience provides the largest venue for swimmers of several ability levels to receive peer and community recognition.

The club team supports the high school program from below by providing the developmental pipeline of age group swimmers that will become the top high school swimmers. Additionally, club swimming provides both training and competition above and beyond the high school level, so that high school-aged swimmers can maintain lofty, long-term goals.

High school competition fulfills many of the identity and association needs of adolescent swimmers in a safe and positive manner. It can help with their formation of both their public and private identity (“I am an athlete”). It can help them feel needed-wanted-accepted by a positive peer group. Even the aspects of school spirit and team pride are vital in the development of a healthy adolescent identity.

Simultaneously, it is in the club setting where the swimmer learns to “hone their craft”. It is at this age where they must decide if they are going to pursue excellence or participation. Excellence in any pursuit is a year ‘round commitment. It is only club swimming that allows this commitment.

Challenges to that Relationship

In spite of the obvious symbiosis, there are equally obvious points of contention. In most states, the high school season significantly overlaps one or more of the club seasons. This has an impact on both the training and competition schedule of the involved swimmers.

Often either major competitions come into conflict; or the training required to meet the swimmer’s long-term goals comes into conflict with the competitive demands of the high

school season. This is unfortunate, because both high school and club swimming provide something unique and of value to the adolescent swimmer.

There is almost nothing that compares to the excitement of high school competitions and nowhere where both the relative novice swimmer and accomplished National swimmer can both contribute critically to the outcome of a close meet. In this setting, all levels of experience and expertise are important and valuable. During adolescence, all children are both peer and short-term goal dependent. High school swimming can fulfill both of these needs in a very positive way.

On the other hand, American club swimming has proven to be the most successful athlete development system in the world. It is both the best possible “farm team” for a high school team, as well as the best possible source of “big thinking” goals to keep swimmers motivated between seasons and well past their high school careers.

Unfortunately, it is often the very best swimmers who are impacted most by the conflicting demands of what should (ideally) be two supportive systems. Like divorcing parents fighting for custody, coaches quickly become focused on their own self-interests (well disguised as the best interests of the child), instead of the long-term development of the athlete and person.

Avoiding Conflict

The best way to solve these conflicts are to avoid them in the first place and, like all other relationships, avoidance is accomplished through frequent, deliberate communications. If professional coaches sit down together and hear the goals of the athlete, develop a plan to reach those goals, and then present that plan to the athlete and his or her parents, very few conflicts will occur.

Solving Conflicts

When conflicts do arise, coaches would do well to learn from the other professions. If we follow the example of the Hippocratic oath and “first of all, do no harm,” both coaches will avoid decisions that use the swimmer as a hammer to beat on the other coach.

If we follow the example of law and act in “the best interests of the child”, both coaches will be required to put aside their personal interests and act only with the swimmer in mind. Neither of these can be done without consulting the swimmer.

It is only the swimmer, and that swimmer’s parents, who can determine “best interests”, because the best interest is the path that keeps the swimmer on track to his or her long-term goals.

Inequities and Inevitabilities

There are times when conflicts are nearly unavoidable. Situations where there are

significant inequities between either the high school and club team, or the high school and club coach are ripe for conflict, as are situations where critical parts of the competitive or training seasons clash. Even the basic philosophies behind high school teams and club sports can cause difficulties.

Unfortunately, although there are thousands of gifted high school coaches in this country, there are simultaneously hundreds of “caretaker” coaches hired out of convenience by a high school principal. Equally often, an experienced high school coach is confronted with an inexperienced club coach who was just hired by a parent board, because he or she was willing to work for minimum wage.

Ideal relationships, by definition, require ideal partners. When one of the partners is significantly less experienced, the responsibility falls on the more experienced partner to make sure that the benefits of both experiences are optimized for the swimmer.

It is professionally and ethically imperative that the more experienced (powerful) partner does not take advantage of the less experienced (powerful) partner, but instead guides him or her in optimizing the experience that both can offer to their shared athlete(s).

Often, the high school-club relationship is inherently “unequal”. Especially in public school teams, the swimmers do not have a choice in swimming coaches or swimming teams. If the swimmer wants to participate, he or she only has one option. Conversely, there are very few situations where the swimmer does not have a choice of more than one swimming club.

This lack of “freedom of choice” on the high school side both makes the high school coach inherently more “powerful” and burdens that coach with built-in resentments. The choice implicit in the club relationship makes that coach less powerful in coach-to-coach negotiations, but much more sympathetic in the swimmer-parent-coach relationship.

As difficult as inequities are to handle, inevitabilities are even more difficult. Inevitabilities are caused by significant conflicts in either the training or competition schedule. An (extreme) example would be the National Championships scheduled on top of the State High School Meet. Obviously, a National qualifier would be an impactful member of any high school team.

If this conflict is only dealt with in the weeks leading up to the meets, the athlete will be caught in between two coaches. If the coaches deal with this, after meeting with the athlete and hearing his or her goals, prior to the season, a decision can be made based on principles and the best interests of the athlete.

A more subtle example would be when the training demands of one team conflict with the competitive demands of another. If, for example, an Olympic Trials-level swimmer needs to put in a significant training block prior to Trials and this training block needs to occur during the taper period of State qualifying, conflict is inevitable.

By definition, all inevitabilities are known in advance. Therefore, there is a professional obligation on the part of both coaches to deal with them in advance and present either their mutually agreed upon plan, or their mutually acknowledged differences to the athlete and his or her parents.

It is proper for coaches to have an “agenda”. It is, in fact, required. It is not, however, acceptable for a professional coach to have a hidden agenda. Both coaches must present their views to the athlete and let the athlete (with parental guidance) decide.

By definition, high school athletics is about teams. Further, it is about teams this season. Club sports tend to be about individuals and developing their potential over the long-term, although long-term development is not a club-only goal.

Many club coaches are not cognizant of the “team” nature of high school coaching, since it is not part of their daily demands. In the same way, long-term for a high school coach can mean, at the most, 4 years, while club coaches are frequently planning 10 year careers. These innately differing world-views can cause irreconcilable differences, unless they are recognized and discussed in advance.

In spite of the inherent conflicts, both experiences are beneficial to the adolescent-swimmer. On a high school team, the swimmer learns to commit to others and be committed to something larger than himself. As a club swimmer, the adolescent-athlete learns to set goals, defer gratification past the horizon of “this season” and do whatever is necessary in order to become the best that she can be.

These two very complementary worldviews are also very different. They can (and do) change how each coach will view nearly any situation. The high school coach will (properly) evaluate every decision based on its impact on the team. The club coach will (also very properly) base those same decisions on the long-term development of that adolescent-athlete.

Conclusion

Perhaps the most difficult aspect for any coach in minimizing the high school – club conflict is learning to take him or herself out of the equation. If the club coach thinks about the effect of a single athlete on a club coaching career, all decisions can be distorted, because it only takes one, great athlete to have a signature career. High school coaches, on the other hand, are faced with needing to win every year in order to be considered a “successful” high school coach.

Both high school and club swimming are critical components in the success of American Swimming and both provide unique benefits to adolescent athletes. It is only with advance planning, however, that the benefits of both can be maximized, while minimizing the obvious conflicts.

Part 2 of this paper will deal with some practical guidelines for building this

communication.

Part 2 – Building a Professional Relationship

In most cases, the high school-club relationship is not a relationship between two institutions. It is a relationship between two human beings. It is a relationship between two human beings who are responsible for bringing up an adolescent-athlete through that teenager's most sensitive years.

They are expected to take a dependent, compliant age-group swimmer and produce an independent, goal-directed, collaborative adult-athlete. Amazingly, they are expected to produce this miracle while that boy or girl is in the throes of adolescence. No wonder there is conflict.

Raising children through these years can stress the most stable marriages, but unlike most stable marriages, most high school and club coaches were paired together in an “arranged marriage”. They seldom have the opportunity to select their coaching “partner”. Usually, the marriage was “arranged” by chance.

Integrity and honesty are the keys to any relationship. Without demonstrable integrity and transparent honesty, there is no credibility. Without credibility, there is no trust. Without trust, there is no relationship.

Since you can't choose your partner, partner by choice. Neither the high school, nor the club coach selected the other, but they can both choose to actively partner for the sake of the athlete(s). One of the sports psychology “tricks” we commonly teach to athletes is to act “as if”. (Act as if you were confident. Act as if you were Olympic Champion.) As coaches, we can do the same thing. We can act as if we have had a long-term, respect-based, successful, professional relationship.

A little courtship can go a long way. Until that professional bond is established, the occasional gift (meet shirt, team coach's shirt, coaching book, etc.) can go a long way toward letting the “other” coach know that you value this collaboration.

Know your partner's beliefs. Different coaches have different and often conflicting beliefs about training, athlete development, even professional relationships. You don't have to agree with someone's beliefs in order to work with them, but you do have to know and understand them.

Don't confuse respect with friendship. It's great if you develop a friendship with the “other” coach, but it is definitely not necessary in order to work well together. In fact, you don't even have to like each other. What is mandatory is that each coach respect the other's right to participate in the planning of the season and in running his or her own team.

It can help to remember that “your” athlete finds something valuable in participating in both of your teams.

Know your needs and speak up for them clearly. A relationship is not a guessing game and a professional relationship can’t succeed in the absence of openness and honesty. Many people fear stating their needs and, as a result, camouflage them. The result is disappointment at not getting what they want and anger at a partner for not having met their (unstated) needs. Understanding cannot occur without honesty. Your partner is not a mind reader.

View yourselves as a coaching team, which means you are two unique individuals bringing different perspectives and strengths. Those differences in perspective and strengths are the value of a team. Your differences allow you to bring more to your athlete - together - than you could by yourselves.

Know how to respect and manage differences. It's the key to success in any relationship, but especially a professional relationship. Disagreements don't sink relationships, but backstabbing does. The inevitable conflicts actually show how much you have in common, because these conflicts only occur when you both care about the same things.

The “secret” to success is professionally dealing with the conflicts that are the unavoidable byproduct of the differences between two people, two programs, two seasons and one adolescent-athlete. Stonewalling or avoiding conflicts is NOT managing them. Stonewalling turns into backstabbing.

Quickly and factually dealing with conflicts is the key to creative solutions. Put any and every difference on the table immediately – no “save ups”. Deal with them openly and factually, not emotionally. When creative solutions can’t be found, the conflict must be presented to the athlete and parent as what it is – a conflict. Often, only the athlete can resolve “un-resolvable” conflicts and they can do it with remarkable ease.

Solve problems as they arise. Don't let resentments simmer. Most of what goes wrong in any type of relationship can be traced to hurt feelings, leading partners to erect defenses against one another and become strangers, or

worse - enemies. Deal with problems or confusion immediately. Agendas are essential. Hidden agendas must be forbidden.

Learn to negotiate. The most precious resource we have at this time in our culture is time. “Dividing” one swimmer during one season strains that resource to the maximum, so virtually every act requires negotiation.

Since both coaches care about the success of the swimmer, every negotiation must seek a win-win solution. That works best when good will prevails. Because people's needs are fluid and change over time, and life's demands change too, good relationships are negotiated and renegotiated continuously. This can only take place when agreements are

met and obligations kept.

Take a long-range view. A coach-partner relationship is an agreement to spend four years working to develop a talented, adolescent-athlete. Compare your evaluations of each “shared” athlete regularly to make sure you're both seeing the same things. Sit down with the athlete and his or her parents to update their career and season goals at the beginning of each “shared” season.

Use your ego; don't abuse it. Ego is a strange and wonderful thing. Without it, nothing happens. With too much of it, all the good gets poisoned. Healthy ego leads to confidence in setting coaching goals and guiding athletes. It allows for multiple “winners”. Too much ego leads to “win-lose solutions”. “Not only must I succeed, but you must fail.”

Warped perceptions of what defines coaching success play a huge role in creating unstable and detrimental environments for swimmers.

Healthy egos create safe places for all to excel.

Maintain self-respect and self-esteem. It's easier for someone to like you and to be around you when you like yourself. Too often, an athlete's success in one program is viewed as a slap to the “other” program. It doesn't have to be that way. In reality, that athlete's success is a compliment to both of your programs.

Research has shown that the more roles people fill, the more sources of self-esteem they have. Leading one program, while collaborating with another, is a legitimate way to develop professional self-respect and confidence.

Humility before pride. There is a reason humility is listed as a virtue, while pride is listed as a vice. If both coaches practice a little humility and remember that it is the swimmer who achieves, both coaches will be able to take pride in “their” swimmer's accomplishments.

Cooperate, cooperate, cooperate. Help each other. Relationships work ONLY when they are two-way streets, with much give and take.

Can the club team furnish timers and officials to the high school team? Can the high school coach gain access for recruiting in the school system? What can you do to help the other coach?

Flexibility is the key to maximizing the potential of any collaborative relationship, along with minimizing stress. Flexibility both requires and stimulates creativity.

Maintain your energy. Stay healthy. Frustrations peak and creativity wanes when people are physically or emotionally exhausted. Coaches can easily get so busy taking care of other people that they neglect to take care of themselves. Save time for personal fitness and health, and avoid trying to solve difficult professional issues when you are sick or tired.

Recognize that all relationships have their ups and downs and do not ride at a continuous high all the time. No relationship is perfect all the time. Working together through the hard times will make the relationship stronger.

Don't just run away from a bad relationship. You'll only repeat it with the next coach-partner. Learn from a bad relationship by examining it as a reflection of your beliefs. Use it as a mirror to look at yourself, to understand what part of you is creating this relationship problem. Change yourself before you change your relationship.

Steps to Success

1. Internal relationships must be stable and excellence-focused before quality external relationships are possible. The relationship of the high school coach with his or her immediate supervisor (Aquatics Director, Athletics Director, Principal, etc.) must be one that is supportive and focused on program excellence.

Every example of a successful collaboration was preceded by an example of strong institutional support for swimming, and a supportive relationship between the coach and his or her immediate supervisor.

Swimming was not treated as a “minor” sport.

2. Recognize that most conflict occurs around talented swimmers. Both coaches must focus on the best interests of the athlete, or they will quickly become guilty of using that athlete for their own benefit.

The club coach will naturally focus on the development of the individual athlete. The high school coach will, just as naturally, focus on the development of the team.

The “greater good” for the club coach will be sacrificing whatever is necessary in order to achieve the athlete’s long-term goals, while the team comes before the individual for the high school coach. The high school coach defines sacrifice as sometimes surrendering pursuit of individual goals for the good of the team.

With two very different definitions of “greater good” and two very different definitions of “sacrifice”, “best interests” of the athlete can be equally hard to define.

“Best interests” can only be determined by involving the athlete and his or her parents in the planning. Ideally, both coaches will have met and developed a collaborative season plan prior to the coach-athlete-parent-coach meeting.

3. Schedule the initial communication. The club coach must schedule the initial planning meeting well in advance of the beginning of the season.

The initial meeting must include:

- a. a mutual assessment of the athlete's long-term potential,
- b. an agreement on how this season fits in to that athlete's long-term development,
- c. mutually developed season goals, and
- d. development of a training and competition plan that will assist the athlete in achieving his or her season goals.

4. Involve both the athlete and his or her parents. After the first draft of the season plan is developed, both coaches must review it with them, in order to make sure that everyone is really working together and that there are no hidden agendas. All parties must be present at this meeting.

5. Communicate frequently, preferably in an agreed upon schedule. Adolescents and their parents can play one coach against the other without consistent and frequent communication.

Do not use either the swimmer or the parent as the "go-between" between the coaches. It is the coaches who must communicate. Information gets "lost in translation" with this type of communication and it puts either the parent or the athlete in a very difficult situation.

6. Priorities should be obvious. Unless agreed upon in advance by everyone involved, the priority should be given to the "in season" sport.

During the high school season, whenever possible if a conflict occurs, defer to the high school team. Before the high school season begins and after it ends, priority should be given to club training and competition.

7. Start at the beginning. Don't forget the lesson program. Either the school system or the club system can run the lesson program, but there must be a lesson program!

Neither team can succeed if the base is ignored.

Part 3 – Examples of Successful Collaborations

Katy ISD and Katy Aquatics (Dana Abbott, Head Coach, Katy (TX) HS; President, NISCA): In the past 14 years, the relationship of mutual respect, cooperation and collaboration has allowed the growth of both the high school and club programs with virtually no conflicts or problems.

The current club program began with the hiring of Seth Huston (currently head women's coach at Rice University). **Seth immediately went to each HS coach to** introduce himself, present his vision for the club program, and **ask** each HS coach **what he** (Seth) **could do to**

help! Seth resurrected a dwindling club program and built it to a position of strength and numbers.

After four years, Seth took a college job and the club was taken over by Kelly Rives, a former club and college standout who continued and further developed the program, while still maintaining close communication with all the HS coaches. Four years after Kelly's tenure, then Head Age Group Coach Travis Sandifer assumed the head coaching reins, and both the club and HS programs have continued their performance excellence and growth.

In Katy, we have a minimum of two, formal "all-coaches" meetings per year; frequent phone, e-mail, and on-deck conversations; and occasional social groupings where conversation quickly focuses on the swimming. Meet schedules are discussed and shared, attention is given to the major club and high school meets, and how the year's training program will impact and be impacted by, the combined HS/Club seasons.

Frequently, it is possible to allow a swimmer to skip a non-championship high school meet to attend an important club meet (U.S. Open, etc.), and just as frequently, the swimmer may miss a local or regional non-championship club meet to participate in a high school invitational or rivalry dual meet.

Every individual's needs are specific to that individual, so we deal with specific meets and specific swimmers on a case-by-case basis. There are sometimes initial conflicts, but for the most part, we are able to resolve situations around what is best for the swimmer, but the bigger high school meets tend to carry more weight than club meets. It is fortunate that most of the time we do not encounter conflicts between "big" high school meets and "big" club meets.

I have to emphasize that **this cooperative partnership exists because** both **the** high school and club **coaches** in the Katy programs **do not have** the **ego problems** seen in many other areas, and ALL of the coaches, HS and club, work together for what we agree is in the swimmers long-term best interests.

Part of the reason for this is because we "agree to agree" that the end-of-season high school championships are going to take precedence, and we also are fortunate that our seasons do not have built-in conflicts that may exist because of scheduling problems in other parts of the country. We also make sure that times achieved in the championship high school meets can be "observed", so that any qualifying times achieved can be used in USA Swimming competition.

Cy-Creek HS (Coach John Webb) and the Cy-Fair Fleet (Coach Clayton Cagle): High school swimming is very important in our area, so important, in fact that the Fleet board invited me to attend the interview sessions with all of the finalists for the job as Head Coach of the Cypress-Fairbanks Swim Club.

After all the interviews were finished, I was asked to recommend the coach who I thought would not only do the best job of coaching swimming at the club level, but also who I

thought would be the best candidate to work with the high school swimming structure in the Cy-Fair ISD. I hope that my recommendation of Clayton Cagle held a lot of weight. He was hired the next week and that was 18 years ago!

In those 18 years, Clayton and I worked very well together for the betterment of each individual swimmer. We developed a mutual respect for each other's

strengths and fed off each other in order to bring out the best in the swimmers we both had go through the Cypress Creek aquatics programs.

One of the things Clayton was reluctant to follow my lead with was the high school water polo program. In his opinion, that facet of our program took away the fall training regimen he developed at the club level - specifically for the distance-oriented swimmers. Clayton personally talked to each of the distance swimmers and recommended they not play high school water polo in the fall.

I took no stand on this because I knew what the kids (and their parents) would

tell him. "Coach Cagle, I want to play water polo. If I didn't play water polo, I probably would have quit swimming a long time ago!"

This doesn't mean that I haven't "backed down" and made some huge

concessions in order to cooperate with the club team and with Clayton. There were many high school meets that conflicted with "more important" club meets. I always told my kids that they should come to me with requests to miss any high school meets due to conflicts with their club program. They all did.

We lost a few meets during the course of the years, because I allowed kids to travel to more important club meets instead of competing in a scheduled high school dual meet or invitational. I think **showing my respect for their efforts ended up growing the respect of those kids, their parents and certainly the club coaches for me**, but most important, I knew that at the end of the season, our "shared kids" would be ready to win State!

Hinsdale, IL (1963-1978) Coach Don Watson: The organization and operation of the Hinsdale aquatics program was patterned after the highly successful New Trier High School Aquatics program, started back in the 1940s by Edgar Jackson. New Trier hired a special aquatic staff to manage and operate their high school aquatic program and conduct its "Community Saturday and Summer Learn-to-Swim School". The entire aquatics program was centered on the high school. It was an ideal situation.

As the Aquatics Director for the Hinsdale School district and the Village of Hinsdale, I had complete control of the combined programs, with the authority to schedule the pool and operate all programs. I had the support of the Board of Education and did not have to compete with a separate Recreation or Park District Director.

I understand the concept of co-funding aquatics centers with taxes from both the School and Park Districts, but **by combining all programming under a single operation, Hinsdale was able to enjoy a cohesive program while avoiding the problems that result from differing philosophies between separate departments and staffs operating a single facility.**

Hinsdale took the program another step past that of the New Trier program by selling the Hinsdale Board of Education on operating a community age group and senior club team from the high school pool, under the control of the high school aquatics director. It was a logical outgrowth of our Learn-to-Swim program and was a feeder program for the high school swimming team.

Many of our most successful high school swimmers started swimming as participants in our Saturday or Summer Learn-to-Swim schools. They became members of our Age Group Swimming Team as 8 & 9 year olds and set a number of national age group records as members of our teams. It was a great bonding, confidence and team-building situation.

Richard W. Shoulberg (Germantown Academy and the Germantown Academy Aquatic Club, since 1969): In the past 35 years, I had only one swimmer who quit swimming with her public high school to train with our club full time.

During the high school season most of my non-Germantown Academy students train once a day with the club and once a day with their high school team. They always train on weekends and they train twice a day

outside of the high school season.

I only require, during the high school season, that they swim one club meet as a “Grand Finale” to their season of swimming. **I think some club coaches forget that the swimmers are student-athletes first.** They require numerous club competitions, disregarding their swimmers’ commitment to high school swimming and their high school academics.

High school swimming plays a major part in their development. I sometimes (privately) question the kind of coaching they receive at their high school, but I never (publicly) downplay their high school coach's approach.

There are a million ways to create excellence in all disciplines.

Coach Bob Laura (Texas): I have been on both sides of the equation. From 1986 -1992 I was the Head Coach of club team of 120 swimmers in the greater Dallas area. During that time, 15 different high schools had at least one swimmer on the club's Senior team. All but one of those high school coaches regularly spoke with me about their swimmer(s).

The most important thing I learned during that time was to listen to the athletes when they had concerns about their high school practice and meet schedule, and how it impacted the club schedule. I always advised the athlete to talk to their high school coach about any concerns they had, then let me know what their coach had to say. This helped me to prepare the athlete for their high school needs, and made me more prepared for the times I would see their high school coaches.

My “best” experience was 1996-2001, in Houston, and the past 3 years (2001-2004) in Granbury. I was the high school coach in both places and have dealt with only one club coach at each place.

We have been able to communicate on a regular basis - especially now with

email - and the athletes at both places have been aware that both coaches communicate with each other, and both coaches share their concerns and training plans with the athlete. Also, **I set my high school schedule after I have seen the USA Swimming schedule** - national, senior, and age group, for the club team. The few times there has been a conflict, both coaches had already discussed which meet would be the priority, and let the athlete know well in advance which meet the athlete would prepare for.

The biggest positive during this time has been the gratitude shown by the parents of these athletes. They are very appreciative that the club and high school coach communicate and care about the progress and goals of their child. These parents attend club and high school meets, sitting in the bleachers and hearing other parents complain about the lack of

communication between the two programs their athletes are members of. This just makes them even more appreciative of the coaching their children receive from us.

Bill Schalz, Marmion Academy and the Academy Bullets: I currently coach a girls and boys HS team and I own a club team.

As a high school coach, my relationship with local coaches has been

quite good. When a swimmer comes to my high school team from another club, I will usually call the club coach and get some insights about the

athlete. Many times, I see the club coach on deck so a phone call is not

necessary. I also make it clear to the high school swimmers on my club team that these swimmers are not to be pressured to switch to our club team.

If a high school swimmer does decide to join my club, I insist they talk to

their former coach and let him/her know they are leaving.

As a club coach, I coach swimmers from many different high schools (8 at last count). If I see swimmers from my club at a meet, I will say "Hi" to the swimmer and see what he/she has been up to (I avoid talking about training or technique). I also talk to the high school coach and see how everything is going.

Finally, I have realistic expectations about the different relationships

between high school and club coaches. I know that neither high school nor club coaches are going to design different seasonal plans for all of their swimmers from other teams; and I know that I am not going to be asked often about what I think the coach should do. I am comfortable with that

arrangement.

At a USAS convention during the height of the USA Resident Team war,

Pete Malone spoke passionately about the swimmers' right to swim where they want to swim. He said (paraphrasing), "It bothers me to hear coaches accuse others of 'stealing MY swimmers'. We (coaches) do not own these swimmers. Americans have died on battlefields to preserve our freedoms, including the freedom of a swimmer to choose who they swim for."

Pete's comments really hit home for me and it is as applicable in this situation as it was during the Resident Team debates.

We must remember how blessed we are to have the opportunity to work with those swimmers who choose to swim with us.

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