

To All NLAC Families:

This is the final reminder about the WSY meet being held October 2-3. I will most likely get to the entries later this evening so if you still wish to enter your child, please do so this afternoon. As it stands right now we will have a good group of 20-25 NLAC swimmers who will take this first plunge into the 2010-2011 Short Course Swim Season. While I hope this number grows and grows as the season goes on, I am really excited to watch our swimmers start this new swim season off with a bang.

With that being said, I wanted to offer you all some of my thoughts on the role of competition in USA Swimming, especially for those of you who may be unsure as to when or if your child should be competing.

It has always been my belief that competition can play an important role in the development (inside the pool and out) of swimmers of all ages and all ability levels. Now, I realize the commitment to attending competitions may vary depending on age. For instance, with the Senior level swimmers, we spoke about striving to attend all possible swim meets. I also realize that sometimes things come up that are important and beyond your control, and may force an individual to miss a meet. For instance, someone has to attend an out of town wedding. Things like this are understandable. However, I would like to get to the point eventually where an older swimmer who misses a meet for reasons other than something similar to the one above is the exception, not the norm.

Younger swimmers are different. I am sure there are swimmers who may have never attended a swim meet with NLAC for various reasons. In my experience as a coach, I often see several main reasons why swimmers choose not to compete that I would like to discuss briefly.

**They are afraid:** I believe there sometimes is a misconception out there that swimming is only for the elite. Sometimes kids are afraid that they will go to a meet and be embarrassed because everyone else will be so much faster than them. I want everyone to know that competition is not just for the elite athlete. The nice thing about USA Swimming is that they have different classifications for swimmers based on ability level. Swimmers will almost always be placed in heats with people of a similar ability level. In addition, it is important for young swimmers to learn to measure themselves against their own yardstick, and not someone else's. Once a swimmer competes in their first meet, they then have a starting point, and they can shoot to progress from that point and according to their own ability level.

I guess it is something about the fear that "I'm not good enough" that I do not want to prevail. Sometimes all these individuals need is one opportunity to give it a try and these fears begin to subside.

**They are too young** - I have seen kids as young as 4 and 5 competing in USA Swim meets and having a blast while doing so. USA Swimming breaks up age groups similar to that of summer leagues so swimmers usually compete against kids in their same age bracket. Kids who compete at a younger age can often conquer any fear they may have and be better prepared to develop in the sport.

**Swim meets are not convenient for families** - Well.....I am not going to mislead you here. The

fact of the matter is that swim meets are often inconvenient for families. In fact, the sport of swimming in general can be inconvenient often times. In terms of swim meets, one of the challenging things about being located in State College is that the chance of having to travel for swim meets is not just good, its a certainty. There is nothing convenient about having to pay for and stay in a hotel all weekend, to sometimes have to take off of work and school, and to lug your other children around too. Nevertheless, parents who find themselves doing this do so because it is what their kids want.

There is no doubt that swimming requires many difficult sacrifices from entire families. Often times parents who make these sacrifices do not get the credit that they deserve. But, please know that in choosing to do these things and providing these opportunities for your kids, you are giving them experiences they will benefit from and remember for a long time to come.

Here are several reasons to consider attending swim meets:

**It gives kids a chance to evaluate their progress and focus their practice efforts toward.**

Let's face it, as coaches, what is one of the main things we are attempting to accomplish with the swimmers at practice? We are trying to help them get better. In terms of swimming, we are teaching them technique so that they may swim more efficiently, we are attempting to improve their aerobic capacity so they may have more endurance, and we are training them to improve their speed and power. The best way to gauge this improvement is through competition. It will help give kids the motivation to come to practice and work hard.

**They are learning experiences.** Swimmers learn valuable lessons through competition. They learn to set goals for themselves and to strive to achieve them. They learn to be humble with their success and to dust themselves off if they fail. They learn persistence and perseverance. They learn teamwork and sportsmanship. They learn independence. These are just a few of the valuable tools that they could potentially gain.

**THEY ARE FUN!** Swimmers will find that some of their most memorable experiences in this sport were the times they spent hanging out with their friends, cheering their teammates on, and meeting different kids from different teams. They will laugh, tell jokes and stories, and make fun of the coaches (probably me). As a result, having a large group at swim meets fosters a sense of team and camaraderie among team members.

Please note that this email is meant to merely share my thoughts as someone who has been involved with the sport for a long time, and not to frown upon those who have chosen not to compete. If you are in this category, please consider my thought above on competition in swimming.

GO NLAC!

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