

It's Not About Butterfly (or back, or breast, or free.....)

Guy Edson

Coach (giving instructions to a group of above average ability 13-14 year olds):
“The next set is nine 100’s of fly on 1:30, descending one through 3, 4 through 6, and 7 through 9. The purpose of this set is twofold: first, controlling your swims, and second, facing the challenge and beating it. We’re leaving on the next 60, get ready to go.”

Swimmer: “I suck at fly. It’s not my best event. Why do I even have to do this?”

Coach: “This is not about butterfly. It’s about your mind. It’s about mental toughness. It’s about learning how to deal with the very difficult. Swimming practice is not designed to be accommodating to what you like, it’s designed to be relevant to what you need, and at the top of the list of relevance is dealing with adversity and learning how to approach the seemingly impossible. This set is an unabashed challenge to your ability to tough it out. Get ready to go.”

However, the swimmer walks out of practice and later complains to her father who comes to the next practice and confronts the coach. “How does an impossible butterfly set help her breaststroke?” he demands.

What can happen? The coach can give the same answer to the father that he gave to the daughter and if the he buys into it, then we have a partnership – coach and father: the coach presents the challenges and the dad provides the emotional support to the child.

If the father doesn't buy it, the child will lose an opportunity to challenge themselves, convince themselves "I can" rather than "I can't", and the coach will recognize an athlete who is not ready to step up and "take a chance" yet, which is the first step to long term success."

Is there anything more important in this coaching and swimming endeavor than learning to deal with adversity? Are you giving your coach the authority, the freedom, support, and the blessings to prescribe workouts which enable the swimmer to develop resiliency?