

The Purpose of Team Travel for Swim Teams

From News for Swim Parents

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Many parents do not understand why coaches want athletes to travel to “away” meets, sometimes including overnight meets. There are several reasons, but one very large performance reason. Let me explain.

The key is to watch what your child does when they attend a local swim meet. The first thing they do, is go and get a... heat sheet... right? And then they scour the heat sheet for their own names and their position relative to their competitors. Because... they know who their competitors are... they see them meet after meet, after meet. And what goes on in our swimmer’s head (let’s call her Betsy) when she does the heat sheet scour...???

“Well, lets see. Suzie’s here, Mary is here, oh my gosh, Sarah is here, I can’t stand that girl... and she always beats me... and here’s Kelly, seeded below me, why would she put in that slow time? She usually beats me, so let’s see, I’ll be... fifth.”

Now, an hour or two later, and our heroine dives in the pool in the 100 free. With brilliant coaching and an even more impressive gene selection from Mom and Dad, she executes a perfect racing dive and streaks to the 25 turn wall, where she turns first, then sneaks a quick peek... “wow! I’m ahead.” Then pushes on towards the fifty wall... amazingly, our Betsy is still on the lead. Now, off the 50 wall, she is so amazed by her own performance she takes a slightly longer look at her no-longer-so-commanding lead, so she can reassure herself that she is still “out there.” By the 75 wall, her lead has shrunk to inches, as the other swimmers realize that the established pecking order is being disrupted and swim harder. Betsy, now wondering exactly what she will say to all these acquaintances others once she has beaten them, and “will they still like me anyway?,” begins to lose focus and slide back into her accustomed place in the pack. By the end of the race, she has creatively found a way to slide all the way back to 5th. She gets out happy to have led for awhile; she has that to talk about, but is happier that the natural order of finish in the kingdom of pre-adolescent girls has not been disrupted. In other words, she is comfortable once again.

Mom and Dad say, “dang, if only she was getting a little better coaching, she’d be beating all those girls.” Coach says, “doggone, with all those sprint genes from mom and dad, it’s hard to get her to finish a race big.”

And Betsy says “that wasn’t so bad, sort of fun, really. Now, where is Suzie, I really ought to go congratulate her.”

Now, after some of this, the smart coach will say to the parent group, “parent group, it is time to go to an out-of-town meet.”

“A what?”

“A meet out-of-town. You know, we get a bus, the kids all travel together, and we go as a team to another area and swim in a meet.”

“Isn’t that expensive?”

“Well, it will be about \$20 a child for the bus, another \$25 a child for Saturday night in a hotel, and maybe \$50 for food, so all in all, just about a hundred dollars.”

“A hundred dollars! Heck, Betsy can’t beat the other girls here in our local area, what does she need to go to a meet like that for?”

Now the coach needs to know the answer... and here it is...

When Betsy swims against people she knows, she has pre-ordained expectations. And she finds ways to make those expectations come true. What she needs, is a chance for a breakthrough performance, to let her believe some new things about herself. So how does a travel meet do that?

Betsy reads the heat sheet... “yup, here I am, Betsy Worangle, 100 free, at 57.89, just a little slower than my best time... yep, I’m in here.” And then what?

She doesn’t know another name in the program. She has no idea where she fits in. So she does what? She just goes out and swims as fast as she can... no pre-conceived notions to live up to... just swim fast. Lo and behold, 56.44, 2nd place.

56.44 would have won at home. But Betsy could not get that out of herself when she had social and athletic expectations to live down to in the meet at home. On the road, she can just “go for it.” And she does. The tremendous advantages of swimming where you don’t know anyone.