

Important Information for the Upcoming Season

Our organization is committed to more than just a “win-at-all-costs” mentality. A “win-at-all-costs” coach has only one goal in mind – to win. While ATOM coaches share that goal (to win) we also have a second goal that is more important – to use the swimming experience to help young people learn “life lessons” and positive character traits that will help them be successful throughout their lives.

We hope that you will help us promote three principals that will have the power to transform youth sports so that sports can transform youth. These three principals are: **1. Redefining the term “Winner” 2. Filling the “Emotional Tank” 3. Honoring the game**

1. REDEFINING THE TERM “WINNER”

In professional sports (which are entertainment) there is only one goal – to have the most points at the end of a contest. However, in youth sports (which is education), there is a second goal: to produce young people who will be winners in life. To help our children get the most out of competitive sports, we need to redefine what it means to be a winner. Winners are people who:

- Make maximum effort
- Continue to learn and improve
- Refuse to let mistakes (or fear of making mistakes) stop them

If our athletes keep these things in mind, they will develop habits that will serve them well throughout their lives. As an additional benefit, athletes who are coached with this philosophy tend to have reduced anxiety and increased self-confidence. Here’s how you can help as a parent:

- Tell your child that it’s OK to make a mistake
- Let your child know you appreciate it when he tries hard even if unsuccessful
- Ask rather than tell. Try to get your child to talk about her swimming rather than telling her what you think about it. Ask open-ended questions that get her to talk (e.g. "What was the best part of the swim meet for you?")
- Recognize that mastery is hard work. Let the coaches critique your child’s swimming. Tell your child you are proud of him regardless of the outcome of the swim

2. FILLING THE “EMOTIONAL TANK”

Research shows that the home team wins about 60% of the time because of the emotional support a team receives when it plays in front of its own fans. Research also shows that a “Magic Ratio” of 5:1 (praise to criticism) is ideal. Help us achieve this with your child! Here is how you can help:

- Your #1 job is to fill your child’s emotional tank. Encourage him regardless of what happens at the swim meet
- Try not to give your child a lot of advice (which after a tough swim can seem like criticism, which drains a person’s tank). When she makes a mistake, you might say, “Don’t worry; let’s go get the next one. You can do it.” After tough losses it is often helpful to acknowledge feelings of disappointment. For example, you might say “I can imagine you must be disappointed after that race.”
- Use “3 Pluses and a wish” technique. Before you give advice, find 3 good things about your child’s performance. Phrase advice as a wish. For example:
 1. You tried hard in the race today (Plus #1)
 2. I also saw you encouraging your teammates today (Plus #2)
 3. And that 100 fly you swam today shows how much you are improving (Plus #3)
 4. I wish you wouldn’t get down on yourself when you make a mistake

3. HONORING THE GAME

Honoring the Game gets to the ROOTS of positive play, where ROOTS stands for respect for:

- **R**ules: we don’t bend the rules to win
- **O**pponents: a worthy opponent is a gift that forces us to swim to our highest potential
- **O**fficials: we treat officials with respect even when we disagree
- **T**eammates: we never do anything that would embarrass our team on or off the pool deck
- **S**elf: we live up to our own standards regardless of what others do

Here’s how you can help:

- Let your child know that you want him to Honor the Game. Discuss the meaning of each element of ROOTS with your athlete.
- Be a good role model. Honor the Game when you attend swim meets. Cheer both teams when good swims are completed. If, in your opinion, an officiating mistake is made, speak to a coach. Use this as an opportunity to think about how difficult it is to officiate a swim meet perfectly.
- Encourage other parents to Honor the Game.