

Development of a Swimmer in the Cape Cod Swim Club

From Coach Marc Solomon

We need your Trust- and this is why we can ask for it.

We need to tell you a little about ourselves. Coach Ron ZuWallack and I have been at this for quite sometime. In the CCSC we need your trust and we need teamwork to develop a swimmer. We can't expect you to learn everything and have the perspective of a seasoned Coach in the short time your child is involved in the sport. The alternative is for you to get to know us, trust us, and learn as much as you can as you go. To develop a swimmer takes the team of the parent, the Coach and the Swimmer. (For ASCA President John Leonard's great booklet on Swimming Parents, Parent, Coach and Athlete, call the office at 508-564-5690 or email us at Capecodswimclub@aol.com). And, we all need to work together in our roles and toward the goal of building a disciplined person who happens to be a swimmer. So, the first thing a parent needs to know is why should you listen to us about swimming? What makes us the experts? Like all endeavors in life, it has to do with experience, education, and commitment. And, probably the best information I can give you in order to ask for your trust is our background and our track record over a long period of time. I started swimming in 1956 and was a YMCA, Boys Club, New England High School Swimmer, AAU Club Swimmer, and College Swimmer. I was Captain of my High School team and my College Team at Johns Hopkins University. I had many great Coaches who influenced me. My biggest influences and my coaches include an American Record holder, a Coach with the most wins in NCAA history, and the US Olympic Team Coach.

My Coaching Background

I started my Coaching career at the Cape Cod Swim Club in 1972 at Otis Air Force Base. It is my educated guess that we are one of a handful (less than 10) of Club teams in the USA that have the same Coach today as in 1972. We were one of the first modern Club teams in New England. When that pool closed, I took a job at the Nashville Swim Club. (In those days called the Nashville Swim N Sun Club, now training out of the Tracy Caulkins Pool in Nashville.) Nashville was one of the hotbeds of swimming in the South and I cut my teeth in my early 20s learning about Club swimming. I then took a job with the Hamilton Aquatic Club in Ontario, Canada. Hamilton is just across Lake Ontario from Buffalo. Hamilton had a great history of aquatics going back to the 1932 Commonwealth Games. In fact, I coached for four years in the Commonwealth Games Pool in Hamilton. Hamilton at that time had more pools per capita than any other city in North America and again I gained great experience. I returned to Cape Cod and re-started the Cape Cod Swim Club in 1979.

Coach Ron ZuWallack

Coach Ron ZuWallack, from Mashpee, was beginning competitive swimming in 1978 and joined the CCSC in 1981, along with his brother, Randy, and his sister, Rebecca. For several years the ZuWallacks had three swimmers in the "top ten" in New England Swimming and all three went on to swim in College. Rebecca became Captain at Navy. The ZuWallacks were a family that found a way to make swimming work at the very best level for all three of their children at the same time. Coach Ron still draws on that experience as he helps families negotiate the "growing-up" stages of a competitive swimmer in today's busy world. Coach Ron's father has been a professor of secondary education at Bridgewater State College for over 30 years. His mother has been an early education teacher in Falmouth and Mashpee for

her entire career. Ron comes from a background which is rich in swimming experience. But, just as importantly, he comes from a background that is about teaching and working with young people. As all who have worked with Coach Ron know, he is a terrific role model. Your child will be well served not just as an athlete but as a person by spending time with Coach Ron.

Despite having a not so consistent program in those early years, Ron became a New England champion and swam four years at the University of North Carolina. He still holds several very tough club records in the CCSC as you will see on the record board in the pool. At one New England Senior Championships in 1990, in a very tough era of New England Swimming, Ron won the 100, 200, and 400 free, and had one of the great CCSC meets of all time. His times were very fast and still are today. He returned to Cape Cod in 1994 and began Coaching for the club. He has coached at every level in the club and this year, will be taking over the role of head coach.

Our Cape Cod Swim Club Track Record- We have very few equals in New England and We are Proud!

The CCSC track record speaks for itself. In USA swimming, the very top level is USA National Championships. Beneath this level is the Junior National program. These levels are what we would call the national level of swimming. We believe The Cape Cod Swim Club is the only club in New England that can make the claim of having qualified swimmers for the National or Junior National level every year since 1984. The CCSC Senior records continue to be broken on a yearly basis with some record falling every year. In the summer of 2007 Tobias Work had one of the fastest swims in the World, the fastest ever from a swimmer training in New England, and the greatest CCSC swim ever when he won the Silver medal representing the United States in the Pan American Games in Rio de Janeiro. His time of 3:50.62 is one of the fastest swims in America. We are, of course, very proud. The 400 meter swim takes great speed, and great training. Tobias' development is a result of the commitment and ability of the entire staff of the CCSC as well as his own great abilities. In the prior summer, Claire Hawley represented the USA in the Open Water World Championships in Italy and Al Roan qualified for USA National Championships in the 800 and 1500 meter freestyles. Each year for the past 25 years the CCSC places 10 or more swimmers in the "Top Ten" in New England Swimming. This happens every year and it tells you quite a bit about the club. We are a small club in a small town, Buzzards Bay, with a small population base. We don't have any more talent than any other club around and probably less. Our swimmers come through our program from a young age and, for us to be successful, we need to do the very best job we can do with each and every child.

Year after year the CCSC continues to produce - swimmers who are Jr. National qualifiers, US Open Qualifiers, National Qualifiers, or #1 in New England in open swimming. There is a reason for this. It is not luck or talent. Other pools and programs in the region certainly have bigger populations of potential good swimmers than we do. The reason is simple. We have the expertise to develop swimmers from the beginning stages at under 10 years of age to Senior Swimmers at 16 and above. We have worked to set up the environment such that it can happen. And, we make the commitment to make it happen.

This is a nutshell summary of our track record and this is why we have the confidence to ask for your support and trust as we ask you to let us develop your child into a real swimmer!

What are the Important Steps in Developing a Swimmer? A long Range View, a thought out approach by the family which is healthy, and an important aerobic base of training.

First is the understanding that this is a long term project and requires a look at the whole child. Parents and athlete first must learn that the process of training is the first step and getting into the mind set of working out as a way of life is key. The family must understand what it takes and do it in a healthy way and in a way which works for the long haul. There is a commitment to schedules, which slowly gains more weight as the child grows. When we train a swimmer we take a very holistic view. We look at the family, the travel arrangements, the yearly schedule, the limitations, the hurdles, and the challenges. We then make a realistic plan with that young person for the long haul.

Often other young swimmers will swim faster than CCSC Swimmers at age 8-12 because at this age no one has trained too much and talent alone often controls outcome. Further, lots of meets can speed a child's drop in times. However, as swimmers reach teenage years, no program in Southeastern New England has kept up with the CCSC. We take a long range view and our athletes come to excel as they mature. We know that aerobic training with fewer meets is not only the healthiest approach in the long run but also develops heart, muscles and lungs in the important aerobic "window" of each child. We build the aerobic base when the athlete is young, from ages 8-14 and that athlete then builds on that in later years. Children do have aerobic windows when the correct training will maximize their abilities in later years. Doing the right kind of training in this window, generally ages 11-14, is crucial in the career of a swimmer.

Understanding that Stroke technique and Physical Training go Hand in Hand and Build on each other.

As swimmers start out in training at young ages, the emphasis is more on stroke technique as opposed to physical training. So, in the CCSC, in our lesson program, the young swimmers age 6,7,8 spend most of their time perfecting strokes. In our Silver Group, with Coach Kathy Lynch, the same is true. Most of the emphasis is spent on perfecting skills as opposed to seeing how hard and fast we can work in training. As an athlete reaches the X Group level, still 12 and under swimmers, more time is spent on physical training and aerobic conditioning. We do want the swimmers to begin to learn how to do a workout and to sometimes swim fast in workout. Still, though, there is a good deal of time spent on perfecting skills. But, as athletes reach senior swimming, most of the time is spent on physical training. Certain amounts of yards and sets must be done each week, and swimmers must learn to keep their heart rate up for long sets as well as learn how to deal with lactic acid in tough anaerobic sets. While amount of yards is only one criterion for measuring the level of workout, it can be a good objective way for swimmers to keep track of their training. The following standards are not written in stone and many great programs vary on these amounts but almost all great swimmers are within the following yardage guidelines as they mature.

10 and unders- mostly stroke technique- workouts 3 to 4 times weekly and workouts can vary but a good 10 and under swimmer can do 2000-4000 yards in a workout in a very healthy way.

11-12 athletes- Swimmers now begin to train although there is still lots of emphasis on stroke technique and perfecting skills. Here, we like to see good age groupers swim about 5000 yards per workout, five times per week. Good 11-12 year olds often swim more in a workout, but the key here is consistent workouts over the course of a year.

12-14- This is where swimmers begin to train more seriously. Often females are a year or two ahead of their male counterparts. This is also where different abilities may lead to different volumes. For example, an aerobically talented distance freestyle female can begin to get to serious yardage here, up to 65,000 yards per week and 50,000 yards is a good week. On the other hand, a sprint type athlete with

fast twitch muscles might have all he can handle at 25,000-50,000 yards per week. Again, stroke technique is still a large part of training however swimmers begin to work more on technique in the context of training. Often times there are two hours of training in which the well trained swimmer needs a workout of 7000 yards. During the course of this workout, the Coach may give constant reminders on technique as the swimmer is working out.

15 and Over- Serious swimmers throughout the world will train 50,000 yards per week and up about 11 months per year. There are variations in training calendars and breaks but the bottom line is that 99% of the great swimmers throughout the world are training fairly close to this model. It is very physical yet great swimmers continue to work on their techniques throughout their careers.

Throughout a swimming career, the physical training and stroke technique go hand in hand. Great swimmers all have differences in their technique. A lot depends on the body shape and abilities and talents of each individual. But there are no prizes for pretty swimming so without a well conditioned body, it doesn't matter how good a swimmer looks. And, the opposite is also true. A sloppy swimmer will have limitations at some point. And each swimmer must find the style that works for his/her particular body type. When thinking about "different ways to skin the cat" it reminds me of the great 100 meter race at the Mexico City Olympics between the fabulous Don Schollander of the U.S. and Michael Wenden of Australia. Schollander was a little past his prime. He had a beautiful classic stroke with a 6 beat freestyle and a slow turnover. Wenden just wailed away with arms and legs and water flying all over the place. They were two great swimmers with opposite styles. Wenden won that particular race.

In the end, form and function go hand in hand. A great boat is only a great boat if it does what it is suppose to do well. If it is suppose to get across the ocean and can do that, it becomes a beautiful boat. Likewise, when swimmers swim fast, they become beautiful and everyone looks to see what they are doing. The point is this: Each body is unique and what works best for one body may not for another. Coach and athlete maximize performance by a combination of training and technique suited to each individual's mental and physical abilities.

There are always obstacles so character does count!

Every swimmer I have ever coached will run up against an obstacle sooner or later in his/her swimming career. It may be a health issue like allergies which prevent good training at times, or rotator cuff problems. It may be a psychological obstacle such as a difficulty in racing to win. It may be a motivational/emotional obstacle such as occurs sometimes when a swimmer hits a plateau for a period of time. It may be an obstacle beyond the swimmer's control such as a parent job change which make it difficult for the swimmer to get to workout. Regardless of the obstacle, this is when character counts most. Lots of swimmers get along nicely for a time in their life but then get off track when they run up against their first real problem. Because swimming is a long range endeavor from ages 8 to adulthood, it is almost inevitable that something sooner or later will get in the way. This is especially true of swimmers because at such a young age, the situation is often dependent on schools, parents, other family members, and general "growing-up" issues. This is when the basic values really become important; honesty, perseverance, sacrifice, positive attitudes- these are the strengths which help all great swimmers overcome their particular obstacles. Character does count and it especially counts in swimming because most of swimming is about the process of training and not about other rewards.

The athlete must depend upon and use all resources. The athlete/coach relationship is key.

Good athletes learn to use all of the people-resources around them to their advantage. Swimmers start at a very young age so this ability to learn from and get support from adults and other young people is a very special ability. Great swimmers often seem to have this ability. The Coach and parents are the swimmer's first and most important resource. The relationship between swimmer and Coach is crucial to a swimmer's development. The swimmer must learn about the give and take in this relationship and develop it with honesty. The Swimmer/Coach relationship is a two-way street like all relationships, and the swimmer needs to give back something to the Coach in order to maximize what the Coach can give the swimmer. What good Coaches want most is a swimmer who has a great work ethic, and becomes a mainstay of the daily workout. By developing training skills, that swimmer has the ability to solve problems and overcome hurdles in his/her swimming career. This then becomes the most challenging and rewarding aspect of Coaching. The Coach has an athlete who has the skills to keep progressing as long as the Coach keeps the training process vibrant. That swimmer becomes a reflection of the Coach's ability to train and inspire young people. Swimmers who get to this level are then giving a wonderful gift to the Coach who loves his profession.

The Swimmer/Coach relationship goes through different stages as the swimmer matures. It often starts out with the Coach knowing what to do and needing the young swimmer to be a good learner and listener. As the swimmer grows, he/she develops more of an understanding of herself as well as swimming and begins to have more feedback into the relationship and the swimming/training plan. In its final stages the swimmer will become a partner with the Coach in getting the most out of training and performing. At some point there is a great level of trust between the Coach and elite swimmer. The swimmer does not need to question the Coach or know the reason for everything the Coach does because there is trust. This is important because in the busy life of a serious teenage swimmer, it's a waste of time to be questioning every step of the journey. It's helpful at times to just keep pushing ahead without worrying about what the Coach is doing. Likewise, the Coach develops trust for the elite swimmer such that he can take input from the swimmer knowing that the swimmer is giving 100% all the time. It is easy to adjust and perfect the training because the Coach doesn't have to question the swimmer's motivation. The Coach then has a more objective view of his training plan and can make adjustments based on fewer unknowns. Knowing that the swimmer has given it his or her best on an emotional and physical level means the Coach and athlete can accomplish more in a given period of time.

Good swimmers have an ability to develop the relationships with parents and Coach such that it is a positive support system for the swimming career. But, there are many relationships beyond those that the swimmer needs to use as his/her support system. Other professionals could include a personal trainer, guidance counselors and teachers, massage therapist, sports psychologist, nutritionist, and friends and peers. It is important for the young athlete to associate and listen to people who will help the athlete achieve his/her goals and be positive at all times. Often times friends, and even parents have a bias or prejudice which can be counter-productive. Successful young people often have the ability to get the most out of support people who help achieve goals and do away with negative input.

The First Goal is to make it to Senior Swimming

As a swimmer matures, the challenges become greater. New young parents of a committed successful 12 year old will often say, "My child loves it; he'll never quit." And, they believe that. But, the Coach that has been around for a while sees all the obstacles too and can help plan for those. Maybe the swimmer plateaus for a while. Maybe the body changes for the worse at puberty and the swimmer has to re-build. Maybe the parents have job or money issues. Maybe a boyfriend or girlfriend comes on the

scene. All of these obstacles and more can be surmounted with a good developmental program. It is my experience that if a swimmer develops properly he/she has a better chance to remain in the sport even if working harder and sacrificing more than a less dedicated swimmer. In short, there is more burn-out from mediocrity than from pursuit of excellence. With pursuit of excellence, we usually come away with a young person who has a love of the sport, as well as many other wonderful skills that remain throughout life.