

YEAR-ROUND SWIMMING: WHAT IT DOES AND DOESN'T MEAN

Many folks are apprehensive about having their kids start a year-round swimming program, for various reasons. They think that year-round swimming means total dedication to swimming, and since their kids are involved in many activities, that would mean having to quit things they like to do. Or they think that year-round swimming means having to give up swimming summer league, and they like summer league. Or they think that every weekend is going to be spent at a marathon swimming meet. Or they think that year-round swimmers are somehow superhuman, too fast for mere mortals.

But all of these are misconceptions. Year-round swimming DOES NOT MEAN that your kids have to become professional swimmers, that they have to swim mega-hours every day, that they have to give up summer league, that they have to spend every weekend at swimming meets, or that they must be superhumanly fast.

ON THE CONTRARY. Year-round swimming is, very simply, a program for kids who like swimming and who don't want to have to quit in early August. Kids can be as committed as they want to be. We ask that the youngest kids (9 years and younger) swim two to three times a week, for a little over an hour each workout. Older kids may swim a little more. If the swimmer wants to come more, that is allowed, but no pressure is put on them to do so. We understand that kids are interested in a lot of activities. Focusing on one thing too early usually doesn't have good results; before long, the full-time swimmer wonders what he has been missing. So we encourage kids to keep playing basketball, and violin, etc. That way, if down the road they decide to concentrate on swimming, they will first have had a chance to do other things and gradually narrow their focus.

SECOND, while it is true that certain USA (year-round) coaches hate summer league swimming, I happen to be very fond of it. I spent almost a decade of summers coaching summer league. The camaraderie, the loyalty, the friendships, the fun of the dual meets – these are all wonderful aspects of summer league. We wouldn't want our swimmers to miss out on them in order to swim USA exclusively. We encourage our USA swimmers to keep swimming summer league, since the two complement each other wonderfully. If we can keep the kids in the water, and enjoying staying in the water and competing, then that is a bonus for both coach and swimmer.

THIRD, USA meets do last longer than summer league dual meets. That is a given, since kids from many clubs are competing, and since there are many more events to swim. But USA meet sessions are reasonable length, and the meets are spaced far enough between so that it's no big deal; we actually live normal lives. Further, having more events at meets gives the kids a chance to swim more than just short sprints. Many kids are not sprinters. In fact, most youngsters, given their lack of size and strength, are not built for sprints. But in summer league the sprints are the only game in town, so some kids who may be very talented swimmers never realize it, because they aren't built for the only races they get to swim, and they get crushed every week. USA gives swimmers the opportunity to try many different strokes and many different distances, to discover where a swimmer's real strengths and weaknesses lie.

FOURTH, USA swimmers are not supermen and superwomen. Quite often the summer league kids who also swim USA are at the top of their age groups at the summer league champs; that is true. But USA kids are no more talented than summer league kids. The only difference is, USA swimmers have more water time and more experience, since they don't take a ten month break every year. Also, because in USA the seasons are longer, we can take our time. In summer league, the extremely short season means that the pace is breakneck from day one until champs. By the time the kids are getting in pretty good swimming shape, the season is over, and seemingly overnight they are out of shape and back where they started in June. It is a shame that they couldn't use that conditioning as a stepping stone to getting really fast. The longer USA season provides that opportunity for longer, gradual development. The improvements are impressive, as witnessed by the kids who have transitioned from summer league to year-round.

So, to wrap up, I encourage any of you who are interested in year-round to join us at the Weymouth Club. We have four training groups in the Waves, our year-round competitive team, determined by age, ability, and commitment level; and two training groups in our developmental team: the JV group with three 45-minute sessions per week and the Waves 101 with one 45-minute session per week. More information is available on our team website or by phoning the team office at 781-682-5820.

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Weymouth Waves
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