

A Swim Meet in January/An Invaluable Learning Process

At the meet this past weekend, while working through the cold mornings and watching countless races with times that were not that competitive by shaven standards, I began thinking, if not assuming, that a parent might be here wondering what the heck we are doing; performances that are not near best times, freezing, and working. So I thought I would offer some insight. Some of my response is bigger picture, but equally relevant to those things specific to actually racing.

With regard to the latter, swimming (even poorly) in bad weather is *exactly* what needs to be done in order to swim well at critical periods in the season and in ones career. While the “time” actually reveals very little and can be very misleading, race quality tells everything. Kids have to learn how to race. And by race, I don’t mean swim faster than someone else; I mean actually learning how to master every aspect of a swim. We had a meeting with the kids about focusing and committing to *get better* in all aspects of the race; from the start and under water speed and distance, to breathing pattern, pacing, turns, and without question stroke technique and balance in the water. This is a process that must take place. As bad as it may feel, and as uncomfortable as one might be, this is actually the process that sets up those one or two great races or meets. And beyond that, it allows the coaches to watch and see if and how kids are developing and responding. Some swimmers may look good in workout with regard to mechanics, but it may not take hold in a race. We need to see that. It is the “practice” and development of racing that ultimately creates the faster time.

We also need to see how kids “manage” a race *and* a meet. These things include maturity and preparation, awareness, post-race evaluation, recovery, warm-up, general focus, and resilience. While this may seem fundamental, most kids are in some way learning and growing in all of these areas. As kids need to improve in the water, there is equally valuable growth out of the pool. We talk about approaching each meet as a “championship meet” *and* as a “champion”, so that when things get more intense, they have mastery of the situation around the race as opposed to anxiety or hope.

The bigger picture has to do with the team. Meets allow a collective energy centered on the essence of team and bonding in a competitive situation. These things include arriving on time (together), being and staying in team attire, connecting with peers, supporting teammates, and have a focus on creating and achieving something bigger than themselves - an incredible team culture.

And beyond this, the coaches actually get to know kids better through the interaction at a meet. Some of this is through casual dialogue and some through pre and post-race discussion. And finally, it brings the parents into the (team) process. And while we know that focus should be on the kids, meets give us an opportunity to meet and get to know parents, and we always encourage some dialogue at a meet or a “check-in” if possible.

Hopefully, this gives some insight into the process as we see it, which extends well beyond being cold, swimming several races without approaching best times, and having a few chicken teriyaki rice bowls. But as good as “CTRB’s” are, the meet process is invaluable to the growth and journey of a competitive athlete and to a team.

As always, the staff thanks you very sincerely for your support and participation.

Donnie

The following is a list of areas of development from an aquatic and a leadership perspective that we talk to kids about. The meet process develops or reveals most of these.

Overview of growth in and out of the pool: Life leader/Athletic leader

Life Leader - Culture

- 1 Work ethic
- 2 Humility
- 3 Team support
- 4 Compassion
- 5 Integrity
- 6 Leadership
- 7 Mentorship
- 8 Resilience
- 9 Service
- 10 Life perspective

Athletic Leader - Process

- 1 Attendance
- 2 Technique
- 3 Conditioning
- 4 Athletic maturity
- 5 Walls/Under water
- 6 Team orientation
- 7 Race development
- 8 Meet maturity
- 9 Goal orientation
- 10 Fitness

**“For a man to achieve all that is demanded of him,
he must regard himself as greater than he is.”**

Johan Wolfgang von Goethe

Below is an excerpt from an article written for parents for The American Swimming Coaches Association (2014).

The Meet Process

At a meet, too often the process is overly simplified and unfairly quantified. Parents drop the child off, unpack the gear, attend to needs, watch the race, look at the time, and evaluate quickly with limited or no data. End of process. Typically, if a child improves his or her time, all is well. The kids are happy (justifies the process) and the parents are happy (justifies the process *and* the kids are happy). But, what if the time was indeed better, and the child arrived late, was not in team attire, shortened the warm-up, spent most of the meet with their best friend (not the team), did not warm down, swam a *poor* race, and bragged about the swim to others?

What if a parent's response to a race was something like this?

"Statistically, there are few occasions that you will perform at your best. I also know that, statistically, every time you step on the pool deck, you can grow and develop as an athlete, a teammate, and as a person. I know there are some things that you cannot control and some things that you can. The reality though, is that the things you can control can change your life in profound ways. The things you cannot control have virtually no bearing on your development as a human being: natural talent, or your performance relative to the rest of the team. At this meet, I don't really care about your time. I understand that that is part of a complex and long-term process. I also understand that in most competitive situations, you will not improve your time. And while I do truly hope that you enjoy great success in this sport, I would prefer to see you fully embracing the athletic process and in doing so, improve your life and the way you live it. What I would really like to know is..." (good questions for parents to ask their children of the meet process):

- Were you on time for *everything* – arrival, warm-up, team meetings?
- Were you in team attire throughout the entire meet? And did you wear it with pride?
- Did you check in with the coach before and after your race?
- Did you warm-up and warm-down appropriately?
- Did you give your best in your races?
- Did you understand the technique and strategy that the coach prepared you for?
- And most importantly, if the swim was "good", did you keep it in perspective, and if it was "bad" did you keep it in perspective?
- Did you find the value in every race?
- How were you in the team area? Positive, engaging, encouraging, supportive?
- Did you complain about anything, or did you remain positive in the face of any challenges (crowded warm-up, tired, hungry, poor swim, etc.)?
- Did you clean up after yourself when you left?
- I am sure there are new swimmers on the team. Did you take the time to meet them?
- I am sure someone could have used your assistance today; did you reach out to help anyone – coaches, parents, teammates?
- Did you cheer for your teammates?
- Would you consider your actions today those of a leader and a role-model?
- Do you think you made the meet better and the team better?
- If you did not do these things, why not?
- If you do not, who is going to do them?

Why can't a parent leave a meet with the feeling that their children were extraordinary, even *with* "poor" swims? Could a post-meet conversation sound like this? *"You were incredible today. You represented yourself as a great teammate and athlete. What you did today would make any coach or parent proud. You had swims that were not near your expectations but you remained positive and committed to the process. You supported your teammates and coaches at every opportunity. You were a great athlete today and it will serve you well in swimming and in life. Here's twenty dollars" (just kidding, there is no pay-for-character here).*