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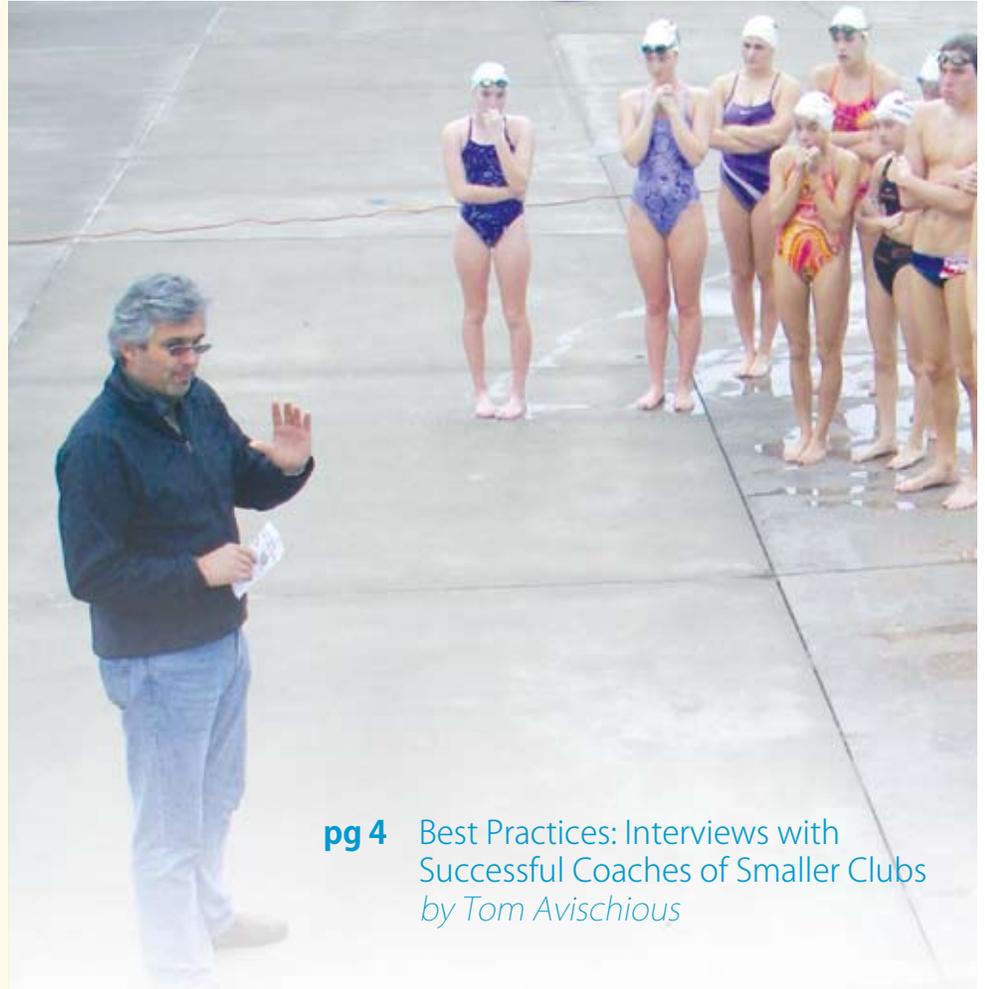
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pg 4 **Best Practices: Interviews with Successful Coaches of Smaller Clubs**
by Tom Avischious

ON THE COVER

Coach Don Heidary of Orinda Aquatics and a training group of his team. Daily our AGE Group Club Coaches set the foundations for American Swimming Success. Coach Don and his brother Ron have "bloomed where they are planted" and created a wonderful team of athletes in Northern California that can be proud of both wonderful competitive performances and a team built on the foundation of great character development. Don is one of the participants in this magazine's wonderful lead story, "Best Practices: Interviews with Successful Coaches of Smaller Clubs."

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Best Practices:

Interviews with Successful Coaches of Smaller Clubs

By Tom Avischious

My name is Tom Avischious. I am the Field Services Director at USA Swimming in our Club Development Division and I have been asked to Chair and to moderate this Panel Discussion.

Last year we did something somewhat similar and what we did to pick the panelists last year is that we looked at clubs that had scored very well in USA Swimming's Virtual Club Championship and we looked at rankings basically for 9 - 14 year olds only. We have the ability to do that in the office and so we picked the top six or seven teams last year in the Virtual Club Championship and as it ended up happening - just kind of by default - I think the smallest team that was represented on the Panel last year had 350 kids on it and it ranged up to I think over 11 or 1,200.

So, the information on the Panel that was given last year was really good, but some people in the audience and I kind of agreed with some of the comments that, yeah, but that is so unrealistic from where I coach and the type of program that I am in. Could we do something this year where we have panelists represented with clubs that are probably closer to what some of you may actually be working with? So what we looked at this year was looking at clubs that scored very well in the Virtual Club Championship over the last year or so that had approximately 100 to 125 or 130 kids on their entire team and not just one training facility or one satellite program, but for the entire team. So that is kind of how we assembled the panel today. I will let you know that Brandon - the team that he is in - he was picked because their team is now going through a merger, but prior to that they were scored very well and they were around a hundred, or less than a hundred kids on the team. So those of you that know Brandon may say, "Well how come he is up there?"

and, "They got over 200 kids now." So that is just so you know.

I will introduce the Panelists as we go down - to my right is Don Heidary. He is the co-head coach and co-founder of Orinda Aquatics. In addition he serves as the head coach of Miramonte High School's Varsity Swim Team. He has also coached the recreational swim team at Meadow Pool in Orinda for 15 years, helping develop that program into a dominant Lamorinda Team. I think a year or two ago he spoke here at ASCA on selling the vision and building the team and commanding the workout. Don is an ASCA Level 5 Coach for US and High School Swimming and was the North Coast Section Honor Coach in 2004. In addition to coaching - in all his spare time - he has worked as an Institutional Equity Trader for the past 20 years at Charles Schwab, Robertson & Stevens and currently part-time for East Oren Capital Management in San Rafael.

Brandon Drawz is next to him and Brandon Drawz - or BD if you hear me call him that - has been involved in competitive swimming since childhood. He had a successful swimming career for the Multnomah Athletic Club, Lake Oswego High School and the University of Washington. A veteran coach of 15 years, he has coached for the former Phoenix Swim Club, Multnomah Athletic Club and the University of Wisconsin - currently serves as the Director of Aquatics and Assistant Athletic Director at Mount Hood Community College, the Executive Director and Coach for Mount Hood Aquatics and Northwest Section Chairman. He is also on USA Swimming's Board of Directors as the Western Zone Director and he has served in his current post with Mount Hood for the past 5 years.

In her 11th year of coaching with Swim Pasadena, Coach Sherry Stoddard works primarily with the age group

program, yet so many of the National Level Swimmers on their team grew their roots in swimming under her tutelage. Although she has only coached for 11 years, she has taught every level of learn-to-swim and stroke technique for over 25 years. She is both the head coach of Swim Pasadena and the head age group coach. She oversees swimming stroke technique, physical training and personal development for the swimmers in the program at the Southern California age group classifications and CSC Senior Developmental Level of Performance. She also works with Shannon Stoddard on the dry side of both the business and team management of Swim Pasadena, as the team is owned and operated by the Stoddard family. She generates and manages the primary communication systems of the team.

Next we have Michael Brooks. Michael is a veteran of 20 odd years of year-round club, high school, summer league and Country Club Swimming. He has worked with all levels from Novice to Olympic Trials and routinely coaches ages 8-18 in his program so he has the beginning, the middle and the end in sight in their mind all the while. He has been the Head Coach of the York YMCA Swimming Team in York, Pennsylvania since October of 2006 - previously spent 2 years as the Head Age Group Coach of Brophy East in Phoenix and before that he spent 5 years as the Head Coach of the York site of the North Baltimore Aquatic Club, where he had the good fortune to be able to work with and learn from Murray Stephens and Bob Bowman. One of the comments that he wrote was kind of interesting: "...finding coaching kids endlessly fascinating and thought provoking - he is continually searching for the very best ways to do things and to order the parts of a program, to find and develop talent, create

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an environment where that talent will flourish, to explore the interplay between biological and athletic development and between technique and fitness” and I like this, “and to find ways of making very complicated ideas understandable and interesting to 9 year olds.” So good luck on that one, Michael.

And then the last person of the panel is John Levine. He coaches with the Aqua Bears in Connecticut. He has over 30 years of coaching experiences and had success at every level. He has had Rec. teams that went undefeated, won league championships, also was the college assistant at Yukon when the women’s team went undefeated and coached an undefeated high school team. John’s primary background is in USA Swimming programs and his age group teams are among the top teams in Connecticut. John’s teams have won dozens of age group team titles and age group championships and his teams have also finished in the top 2 at Age Group Regions and Senior Championship.

So – those are the panelists. I have prepared a laundry list of questions that we will be working through, but if you have got a question that you are really dying to ask one of the people – we will try to take questions as we go. There may be something that you really need to have expounded on a little bit so please feel free to do that. The way this is going to be structured – we will be doing 3 one hour sessions and they are not all going to be different topics we will be covering. We will take 15 minute breaks or so after each hour. The first thing that we did want to do is have everyone – the coach and the panel go through and just offer a couple of minutes – 5 minutes or so – of team structure and philosophy. It may help if you look at the handout when they are going over some of that. So, let’s start and go down the line.

DON: Well first – I appreciate the opportunity to be here. Orinda Aquatics was founded 17 years ago by myself and my brother. The team structure is probably a little bit different than most of yours. We operate in a community that is unique,

I think, in the nation. I would love to hear any feedback from any of you facing the challenges that we do. We coach in a community that has a Rec. League in three small towns with more than 3,000 Rec. swimmers and there is a rule that you cannot swim with a United States Swim Team beyond December 31. So, it is basically a Rec. dominated community. We started Orinda Aquatics 17 years ago and on average our team size has been under 100 in a community of 3,000 kids that swim. It is a fairly well-to-do community with parents that are very committed, so they have all the resources to be an extraordinary swimming community. And not only is it Rec. dominated, but there is almost an anti-United States Swimming sentiment. We have talked to people very high up in United States Swimming and they find it hard to believe that, one - the structure exists, and two - the mentality exists. But another point in that regard is, I coached the local high school team, and there are, on average, about 125 kids that swim high school, with, on average, about 5 that train year around in the same community with our year-around team. So Orinda Aquatics has been about 95 to 100 kids for the last ten years.

The team is top-heavy. We have about 2/3 of our kids at the high school level, 1/3 pre-high school. We have two workout groups – one for the high school – one for pre-high school. And that is basically it. Within those groups there are sub-groups based on ability, and for us it has been a challenge because the average starting age of kids is probably about 13 or 14 years old. So we get them, generally, late in the swimming cycle. I would just say that our core philosophy of the team is Character First. We drive it hard every day. We have had a lot of success. Our team has won sectionals. We won Junior Nationals in Anchorage, Alaska years ago with 75 kids on a team. We won Far Westerns, and this year we had 40 of the entire team qualify for sectionals. So we have done well with the team structure, with the landscape. And I would say – I would love to continue on this - the driving force of Character is the

dominant theme of the team. So I will end it with that.

BRANDON: Hello everybody. Tom, I want to thank you for inviting us up here and especially for giving us a bowl of candy in case our blood sugar drops during these next three hours. And if anybody else has that problem we have a couple of bowls of candy up here for you.

And thank you also for the disclaimer. Some of the questions that I will be answering go back to what our former clubs used to do, and what we are currently doing and planning to do, so I might jump back and forth a little bit. If that is confusing at all, please jump in and ask the questions there. I need to also tip my hat to Jim Bowe who is our Head Age Group coach, and the rest of our staff at Mt. Hood Aquatics, for helping go through these questions with me and prepare for this. I am not sure if it was clear from the sheet that was handed out – we are a non-profit organization – that is – there were two older teams that merged this year. I think specifically we will be talking more about Mt. Hood Swim Team from the past.

When we are asked how our team is set up – ours is set up a little bit differently. We were asked if we were institutionally owned or coach owned or what not. I put down Executive Board, and the reason I put that down is I believe that our team is a little bit unique in how we are set up. We tried to set our team up so that it has checks and balances and certain branches of government, in a sense. So we have an Executive Branch - which would be the Executive Director, which is myself, and essentially our coaching staff. We have an Executive Board which governs the team. They really only work with a few things. They hire and fire the head coach. They set our budget and they protect our water time. They are, sort of, our long-term thinkers and I work with that group quite a bit. Then we have our parent board, which is sort of our congress, which can essentially over-rule anything from the Executive Board. So it is a nice balance and I think it works well. You have to have very dedicated people and have very

clear lines of communication so that everybody knows what their roles are and what the rules and responsibilities are of each one of those groups. So I think we are a little bit unique there – I might be wrong. But I really like the way that we are set up and it has worked very well. You also need a really, really strong group of parents to do that. We have a phenomenal group of parents. Having worked with, you know, college, Phoenix Swim Club, Multnomah Athletic Club, all these different models, you have to have these folks there to make your operation run.

We are headquartered out of Mt. Hood Aquatic Center - I do not know how many of you have been there – our Flagship Center. Then we have three other facilities that we work out of, which are essentially high school single 25 yard or 25 meter pools. Each one of those sites - and I am sure we will go into more detail about this - is set up to be as comprehensive as it can be at each one of those pools. For example, at Mt. Hood we can do everything from infant lessons through our Masters Program, Water Aerobics - the whole bit - since we have 4 bodies of water there. At our other pools, each one of those is set up to have a lesson feeder program that is essentially just to get kids in the water and to grab onto as many of those kids as we can, and run them through our age group and senior programs and hopefully finish some off in our Masters Program when we are done. So we really try to do a birth to grave thing. In fact, we held our first funeral last year at Mt. Hood Aquatic Center, and just last week we did our first wedding - which was our Head Master's Coach. So we kind of do it all there.

I do not know if any of you know Denny Baker. Anyway, we are set up with 9 coaches. We have the head coach, we have an assistant head coach, and a head age group coach. Each one of our site coaches is essentially a mini head coach, and they run their own businesses that are umbrellaed under Mt. Hood Aquatics. Then each one of those – if numbers allow – have an assistant coach at each one of those sites. That is kind of how we are set up.

SHERRY: Hi, I am Sherry Stoddard and I am here representing Swim

Pasadena. Our team was founded in January of 1998. We started our team with 24 swimmers – 23 of which had Junior or Senior National Times. Previous to that my husband had coached and he and I coached the team together, along with my daughter. There are just three of us that coach and my other daughter, as Tom stated, helps do all of the dry side. And we do all of our own billing, etc. We were one of the original team unified teams. Tom Fristo was one of my husband's swimmers when my husband coached at Mission Viejo so we started – implemented that and it has been tremendously valuable for us so we started the team with only a senior group and within a year after traveling all over the LA area, using the Coliseum Pool, the old Pasadena City College Pool, some of the Pasadena Unified High School Pools we were able to move into the new 50 meter pool that was built at Pasadena City College, which is where my husband is a tenured full-time professor, and I teach part-time. So we kind of have the ability to oversee everything that goes in and out of that pool and we – when we moved there - we added an age group program and went to about 50 kids within about a year and a half to two years. We are presently at about 120.

We have three training groups. My husband coaches a Senior Group – Senior I – Senior II and his National Team – all at the same time. He has about 50 people in his training group and out of that group – in the last, I believe, six years or seven years – we have had one person on the National Junior Team or more. We had 5 people at Olympic Trials last year. We are now a Silver Medal Club. Last year we were a Gold Medal Club and we have won one of the titles and/or been first and/or second or first combined at our Junior Olympics in the summer for the last three years. And in our Spring Junior Olympics, which is very competitive in Southern California, our guys have been second previously. So we focus largely on teaching life skills to the kids. Yes, we focus on swimming and work on doing things competitively, but we truthfully believe that - when you get to the bottom line – the character that they learn to help them in the pool carries over to school life. Teaching them to do it the right way – whether it be doing the set correctly, starting over, etc. – plays

a large part in our being able to be successful.

In the Pasadena area there are numerous private schools. In that older group I think we had 30 high school people last year at 21 different high schools – just in the Pasadena area. Because we have so many different levels, etc. and we had of that age swimmers – we broke – I think – about 6 CIF records. We had Southern California records and we had a young man that broke Michael Phelps' 400 IM 13-14 record. But he is not American, so it does not count as a National Age Group Record. Hard work and, again, teaching them to do things the way that they should play into that.

Our feeder system: There were five areas that started "Swim America" for ASCA in 1988 – a long time ago. When we were in Mission Viejo, I was one of the original five teams. And I have maintained my "Swim America License" so, through the college, we run "Swim America" in the summer only, and use that as a feeder for our team. This last year we had a young man that started in lessons when he was 6, and was on the Southern California All-Star team – the NACC team as a 13 year old - and had some top ten rankings in the Nation. So we kind of look at trying to take it – as he said – from, I think he said, birth to grave. But my husband's statement has always been cradle to cane. We are trying to work on doing that. We presently do not have a Masters program, but all the swimming classes that we offer at PCC are available to people that want to come in and do Masters training and, therefore, then they get to train with my husband so.

MICHAEL: Hi, my name is Michael Brooks. I coach at the York YMCA. That is in York, Pennsylvania. Right now we are about 100 swimmers. This past November we moved from what we called "the dungeon" to a brand new pool – perfect State of the Art – not quite 50 meters – 40 yards. So we are a little bit more limited than I had hoped we would be, but we had to train 25 meters most of the time which I think is second best to 50 meters, so we will take it. Our groups are split up into – like everybody else's – Juniors and Seniors – 2 Junior Groups

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- 2 Senior Groups and they are pretty much split by commitment levels.

Up until fairly recently I was coaching everybody except for about 10 novices - directly, myself and as the top end has gotten higher and higher - that got a whole lot more difficult to do. So we brought in a few assistant coaches to help out so that I don't go absolutely insane. I work for a YMCA. This is the first time I have ever done that and it is unique - a lot of challenges that I never thought I would have to face and a lot of challenges I haven't figured out how to succeed at yet. One of the biggest is that at least at my Y - we don't like to pay coaches so I have to deal with a lot of volunteer assistants that usually translates into parent volunteers. A lot of passion there and that is a great thing - that is a necessary thing. But it also means that, by and large, the folks that are working for me have very little real experience in coaching, so that I am spending a fair amount of time coaching the coaches. That is good. I don't have so many bad things I need to erase - I can kind of bring them up from the cradle as coaches - coaching with the same kind of eyes and same kind of emphases that I have. It just means that it is a lot more work. But now I am kind of overseeing the whole program - coaching the top senior group, coaching the top junior group and then writing the practices and kind of keeping my eyes on the "B" groups as well.

As far as our groups go, we have come a long way in a few years and anytime that a program changes coaches - with different personalities, emphases and goals - it is a huge culture change. And it was really, really hard the first year or two. It is a lot easier now because the people who are here no longer hate me. They actually want to be there in my program so it is a lot smoother now. It is a lot more fun to come to practice and our senior group has been really coming along. Probably half of our senior A's are already at a National level and the other half I hope will be there fairly soon. And it is a small group - again, only about 100 total and that includes about 10-15 novices. We do workout of only one

pool. Previously we were stuck into six lanes, 6 foot wide lanes and it was just a zoo. Now we have plenty of space. We can actually grow, which we need to do.

As far as emphases of the program - we are very much an IM based program. I absolutely love USA Swimming's IMX program and I post our results after every meet. We have special awards based on how kids do and we pay attention to National Rankings to LSC rankings. In fact, all of the kids from our program over the past couple of years who have made Nationals Select Camp or Zone Select Camp have been selected because of IMX scores. So we take it very, very seriously. I am also very big on brain-washing so the psychological aspects are huge. In the beginning of every season - the first month or two - most of our dry land training is spent with philosophy sessions so I am trying to teach kids how to think so that they will be very, very successful when we swim. Then the other main emphasis is stroke technique. I absolutely cannot stand to watch ugly swimming so we swim "pretty" all the time. Whether we are swimming slow, medium, very fast, whether we are rested, whether we are tired, we are going to look good.

JOHN: Hi - my name is John Levine. I coach the Aqua Bears in Northern Connecticut. We are actually a really tiny team compared to these other teams. I am hearing Tom talk about this being a group of small teams. I would love to be as big as some of your teams. Until a year ago we were probably less than 40 kids and the reason we are up to 70 or 80 is because I added a satellite program. So we are tiny and I haven't figured out how to get big in a 6 lane 25 yard pool and still have kids being able to perform at the top end. Our biggest problem is we are in an area that is not really big on swimming. You know, there are hardly any country clubs in our area. There is very little recreational swimming. The other end of Connecticut - swimming is gigantic. But where we are it is tiny. Basically everyone we have at our senior level started with us as 10-and-unders and we are pretty proud of the results that

we have gotten. We actually had a girl finish 10th in Olympic Trials last year that started with us as a 6 year old. So that is kind of what we have to do where we are because we can't steal anybody from other clubs - which is kind of a nice situation to be in. Even though I am at every workout coaching every kid at every possible level, I still consider myself an age group coach rather than a senior coach. I am pretty much an age group coach where the kids get old and become senior swimmers.

The big thing in Northern Connecticut - I do not know if you have this problem in your area - is the conflict we have with high school swimming. They put in so many rules keeping the kids from training with us, from competing with us, especially with a small team, if I have 6 or 7 high school kids they cannot train with us, you know, that could be half of my senior program. Suddenly the 12 year olds are swimming in our top lanes. So I think that is a problem that I would like to see solved somehow, but I am not sure how that is going to happen.

As far as coaching goes, I am the only full time coach. I have two volunteer assistants, so I am at 9 workouts a week. Which is nice - I get to know everybody. But after coaching for 35 years it is sometimes tough to show a lot of patience with a 7 year old that won't get in the water when you have somebody at the other end that is trying to make Junior Nationals. And keeping that all under control without assistants, again - the biggest problem where we are - we don't have long course training. We have one six lane pool - 25 yards. So the conflict is, do you want to get big and be a commercial success, or do you want to stay relatively small and good. And depending on how much my wife is spending, I can go either way on that. So, my son says, "You shut up and make it as big as you can and some kids will get good by accident." But I can't do it that way.

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actually have a lot of pool time. We have close to 24 hours a week. My top swimmers are in the pool the entire time. We rely on our younger groups to develop into senior swimmers. We are not running, you know, 50-60 kids through a learn-to-swim program. It is kind of selective and, you know – again, it is a compromise we have to make. I am intentionally keeping a small team because I want the elite level kids to get that opportunity to train like elite swimmers. And it is always that conflict – do you want to be big and put 8, 10, 12 kids in a lane, or stay small with 3 or 4 in a lane and have some really good kids. So, I don't know if you face that in your programs, but that is always a conflict in my program. So, I'm not sure what the answer is.

It would be nice if, you know, we didn't have to pay for pools or anything and we are just funded by somebody else and did not have to worry about making money. But unfortunately we do. One way I have gotten around that is I have been running 7 meets a year, which is, without crowding the pool, the only other way of getting income. There are just so many candy bars the kids can sell. So that is basically where we are at.

Like I said, we start off very, very small. Our junior program is only two hours a week. What I have noticed about some of the area teams (and there are not a lot of area teams) is that it seems like the teams in our areas over-train their little kids and under-train their older kids. So I have parents calling me up saying, "You know, your team is really good. We would like our kid to join. How often would she swim? She is 10 years old." And I said, "Well, we will only let her swim three times a week." And the lady will go, "Well, she is swimming five days a week now." And I will point out, "Well, you are calling me because you are not happy." So we don't let our little kids train all that much. I guess we must be doing okay, if this was based on 9-14 performance. Our younger kids must be doing okay, but it is not because we are beating them up swimming five or six days a week. If there is one thing that I have learned

after 35 years of coaching is do not do that. You know - just don't. The parents will call you up begging you to get into higher programs – the kids might even put the pressure on you themselves. But our strongest theme on our team is we are going to wait and when they get to 12 or 13 they get plenty of opportunities to train. Like I said, some of our top kids are going 70-80,000 yards a week in the top groups - they do not need to be doing that at 10. So I think where we have been successful is holding them back where some of the other teams do not, and then their kids just disappear when they get a little older.

TOM: Just one other – two quick comments in case you didn't know – Don's team is in the Bay area and Brandon's team is in the Portland, Oregon area. I think most everyone else mentioned kind of where their team was from. John, I want to pick up on one of the comments you made, just for the panel and anyone that wants to jump in.

Question: What do you do with the "talented 10 year old? The future budding Olympic star in the parent's eyes who can train with 12 year olds"?

JOHN: Well, what we do is – I can't – with only six lanes and the entire team there at certain points – we do not really break it down in terms of age as much as I would like to. Sometimes the 10 year olds wind up swimming in a slightly higher group than they should be and that worries me because their friends are not in that group. They are there and they can repeat with those kids, but you know – they want to talk about Sponge Bob and the other kids are dating – it doesn't work so you know – you try to hold it back – you know – sometimes maybe you keep those kids down a little bit and they can be the top and be the leaders of the younger groups, but you know – we are forced to merge the younger kids with the older kids. We try to keep down the volume. I do not want the training volume to be up too high at 10, but you are right – you get a kid that is really good – we certainly do not let them train more than 3 times a week, but they might sneak in with the lower end 13 and over's just because

you have to or they will be running over some of the new kids.

TOM: Someone else?

BRANDON: We are fortunate – I like this question a lot, and Jim and I talked about this and we are very fortunate because we do have a lot of water time and we have the ability to separate these groups out. One of the ways that we do that is by age so that – we try to mitigate this problem by never letting the 10 and 11 year olds near each other in the same practice, so it is not really an option for them. Of course, you are always going to get the over-zealous parents that want them to do more, and that is another topic, but again – we are very fortunate to do that. When we separate them out and they are only swimming – you know – three times a week for 45 minutes – we really just stress the basics – you know – kicking – learning how to read the clock – stroke work – have fun. So we are pretty lucky that way. I have been where you are at and it sounds like you are doing a good job.

SHERRY: We have a little bit more unique situation in that one of the things that we stress on our team is family. Two years ago we had six families on our team with 4 children. I think we now still have three and over 50% of our team has two or more children on the team because of the drive for several people – for many of the people transportation, etc. – we do allow the younger ones to come more, but we do not have them do what you might do every day in practice. One of the things – from a parental standpoint – having both of my children swim and do various and sundry other activities, which is something I really condone way up until they are 12 or older. My girls did softball and gymnastics and dance – I mean – I was driving all over when they were little – all over Mission Viejo. One of the things that was difficult was if their practice was only offered Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Girl Scouts decided to be on Wednesday. Then we gave up the day of practice. So, to accommodate our families – because one of our first things we emphasize to everyone is that we are extremely family oriented – family principles and values – we offer

practice every day. We ask them to only come 2-3 days a week if they are young. If they come more because the siblings are there, we have ended up being the babysitter - which sometimes happens because in many of our families both parents work.

To decrease what they are doing we separate them into different lanes and they do less of a workout. The 10 year olds - the 9 and 10 year olds that are a little bit more advanced than our novice group - again - remembering that we only have three training groups. We have our novice group that my daughter coaches, and then my group, and then my husband's group. Within my group there are four different groups and we segregate those kids by their age and they go on a much slower base and do a lot less yardage and sometimes get out early, etc.. That is our way to be able to accommodate and keep the family intact when we have people that drive 30 - 35 - 40 minutes to be able to come and be a part of our program. It is not the best thing to do for the younger kids, but it accommodates when they have an older sibling that is a junior or senior national level swimmer and they are driving 45 minutes to come so that the whole family is there together.

Sometimes we have the younger kids get out and we have parents that help them do their homework or do tutoring sessions so that we are actually addressing the student/athlete situation - even though they are quite young at that young of an age so in a not so perfect situation where we can't just say don't come because they are going to be there anyway - sitting and playing in the stands and the parents would rather have them in the pool - we accommodate that way. We have some kids that come one week Monday/Tuesday/Friday. The next week they come Tuesday/Thursday/Friday - depending upon their school commitments and any other activities they are involved in so it tends to work for us. Our retention rate for our younger kids on our team is about 98%. We have very few of them drop out - again - some of them do not have a choice because their older siblings are there, but it tends to work and they tend to stay with it - at least all the way through the high school swimming level.

FROM AUDIENCE - Question: Do you find that those younger kids progress faster because they are there more?

SHERRY: I think that looking at young children - each child is individual and different. The children that are self-driven will do what we are asking them to do, and will progress faster. But not the parentally-driven children. We do not allow the parents on the pool deck, so they do not do just what mom and dad, sitting there watching them, want them to do. I believe that makes a difference that some of them - and in my years of working with children, not only just coaching, but teaching - there are young children that are really self-driven and they are going to progress faster no matter what. And then there are the ones that tend to look at you and you realize that they are off on some other planet while you are talking to them. They just kind of sit there and look at you and they each kind of go through their own maturation - it is very different. My daughter is excellent at making it fun because we have probably in her group of 30 nine-and-unders - starting at age 5 up to age 9 - some novice level kids - probably 60-70% of those kids come at least four days a week because of the sibling so she will be swimming and she will stop and take them over and they will do - have a hand-stand contest and the parents are up in the stands going - oh my God - you know - they are not swimming or she will let them play sharks and minnows, but she stops and has them do fun things so that she breaks it up so that it is not the intensity level that the older kids are doing all the time so our retention rate - like I said is good, but again - most of them are siblings and kind of - that is what their family has done so that is what they do.

TOM - Question: Along the same lines and this one may be a little bit harder. In terms of "move-ups" - what do you do with the talented 12 year old? And in particular, I am thinking more like of a 12 year old girl who can train or may be faster than some of the swimmers in the senior group - do you have any specific policies on that?

MICHAEL: Can I take this one? I have been dealing with this exact problem with both a boy and a girl for the past couple of months and

I realize that their progression was getting slowed more than I wanted it to by them staying in our Junior Group. I realized that I didn't want them treated as, and I didn't want to treat them as our top Senior Group and I realized that the sociology of our Senior B Group was not where I wanted my top 12-13 year old kids. I think you need to take into consideration where you would be moving them to and if that is the right environment for them. So what I did was on the fly - create a Senior A Sub 1 - so I have got four new kids in my Senior A Group that - you know - is in a training environment with kids that are really committed - really care - really, really want to be good. But I treat them very differently and having the lane space to be able to carve out a little place for them where I can - you know - respect their goals. But treating them as they need to be treated, I think, is huge.

And with respect to this previous question - right now I am in a blessed place in that I have got 5 lanes for my Junior A's which means I can have 5 different practices if I want to make 5 different practices - usually I want to make 3 or 4, but that means I can sub-divide and try and meet as many different kinds of needs as possible so I do not just have to treat everybody in the Junior A Group as if they are the same age - same ability - same commitment level - have the same needs - the same biological age, blah, blah, blah. The more lanes you have and the more you are willing to think out what this small group of kids need - what this small group of kids need - the better off you are going to be - the more you will be able to target the kinds of work you are giving individual kids and with any luck - the more continual progress and the higher those kids will get.

DON: I just had a couple of comments - we have dealt with this for years at the summer league level and at the USS level and we take a long-term approach and we sell the parents on the long-term approach and I think that if you move kids up - based on parent desires or absolute numbers at times - I think that is more of a mistake. There are social implications - ego implications that come out of moving kids up prematurely that I think are more

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destructive than productive and I agree with the previous comments that it is better to keep kids in their social group and give them more attention and push them harder – maybe create standards within the group rather than just moving them up to train with kids that are older and maybe swim at a higher level, but I think that if the parents understand the big picture and the kid does and you motivate the kids individually and leave them in their general area I think it is more productive for the long-term and we have seen that over the years.

BRANDON: I agree with that completely and I think what is important is that when you are moving kids up – whether you have a unique case or not because you are always going to have the unique case of the 12 year old girl who is faster than your 16 year old girls is that you need to know where the end of your program is going to be, so longitudinally – where do you want them to be when they leave your program? Have you set them up to go to college so they can have a successful college career or have you tapped them out when they are 13 years old? So, you have to look at your whole program from the 40,000 foot level and work backwards just like you would with the season plan. A longitudinal plan is just over a number of years; your season plan fits into that and then your weekly cycles and whatnot so the same thing has to happen with your move-ups and your curriculums – at least from our perspective. One of the things that we try to do is on Saturdays – in particular – we bring the senior kids and the better age group kids together in one workout – all of the separate coaches are on deck together, but it requires a great deal of coordination and discussion and planning beforehand so that we are working on maybe some of the main sets together and they are getting used to maybe some of the older coaches at those workouts. It is not every day, but it is, you know, you are there – they get it. You are still there as the age group coach so they can feel comfortable. They are still in there with their peer group for the most part, but you might pull some kids out periodically to do that. One of the things that I learned very quickly

when I coached at the University of Wisconsin and if you are using all of your resources and coaches and you are splitting everybody up so that they are coached in their specialty it is very, very easy to become four teams very quickly so you always have to be very conscious of that and make sure that you know what the end goal is for the entire team and bring everybody together as much as you can so that everybody is comfortable with each one of the coaches.

JOHN: Anyone who knows me knows that I am a pain in the neck so I am going to disagree a little bit – which might even contradict what I said previously, but I thought the question was – what do you do with the talented 12 year old that is kind of a hot shot and I am thinking – by the time they are 12 – turning 13 – especially a girl – I have got to think that they are becoming senior swimmers. If we have Olympic Team Members that are 15 – I don't think we need to hold back a talented 13 year-old that much. Again – if they are two years away from potentially being – you know – World ranked. What we did and we were in this situation this summer in that I had a 12 year old – turning 13 – that was actually probably Top 10 in the United States in events like the 200 fly and the 400 IM and if I kept her down in her age group it would be kind of like if you compared it to public schools and you have the really talented kid that is sitting in the classroom totally bored because they are not being challenged so I was afraid of – instead of letting her stay there and just not even having to work to dominate her training group – she is really as good as my 15 – 16 year olds and I know she can't hang with them socially, but we are a small enough team that it is kind of like a family and the older kids look out for her and I have to think some of these little kids that have grown up in the United States – the little Katie Hoff's and Elizabeth Beisel's – they could not have been training with 12 year olds when they were 12 because they were just too good – you know? And I am sure their coaches – I wish Paul Yetter was here or Chuck Batchelor to find out what these guys were doing at 13, but I have to think that some of them were allowed to

train with Seniors.

In my situation – where we only have six lanes, it is just a matter of not having one kid killing somebody else in triple lapping them and while still challenging the kid so I am not totally disagreeing because you heard me say before – we hold our 10's back, but I think once you are 12 or 13 – especially the girls – you are a senior swimmer – I think you can be because some of these kids – you look at their times Nationally – they have got to be training more than the average learn-to-swim 12 year olds.

FROM AUDIENCE - Question: You said you were in a Y, and there was some push from the Administration to get younger kids onto the team and involved in the swimming and so is there any criteria involved as kind of minimum standards and how do you get kids onto the team.

SHERRY: Basically what our criteria is if they are 10 and under – to start in our novice program. They have to be able to swim a lap with a great semblance of the reality of the stroke – of freestyle and backstroke and then – just those two strokes – and then in that group 75% of each day's workout – which also when they come every day – it is not like training – it is working on drill work. We use positive drive fins almost 99% of the time to help teach breaststroke and work on their butterfly flexibility and it makes for kids that tend to sink – it makes an incredible amount of difference and teaches them how to be able to do the stroke more correctly.

JOHN: I would say in our group – I was going to be a wise guy and say we have two selection criteria – 1. You have to be safe in the water so that 50 coaches do not have to jump in and 2. Your parents have to have a valid checking account – Those are the two reasons I would have. Seriously – our younger kids – we do take them before they can swim. We have to because we are in an area where they do not learn how to swim, but we do say that they have to be safe and we do not have closed practices and as I see the mom's getting closer and closer to the railing I will yell over to the Assistant

Coach that the 5 year old is about to go under in the deep end. We haven't had to go in after any of them yet, but we do have some that seriously – the first season – they are on a kick board most of the time and we tell them to stay close to the lane lines so – you know – but that is what we have to do because we do not have really good learn-to-swim programs in our area so we cannot be that fussy.

BRANDON: I would like to add to the valid checking account – it actually has to have money in it too – so they can pay the bills, but essentially we focus on freestyle and backstroke and we spend a lot of time on the kickboard as well. We are fortunate enough that we have our own lesson programs at each one of our pools. Now, not every single one of our swimmers comes through those, but we can start them very young and we have a pre-comp group that goes after that where we start to work on a little bit more of their strokes so we just try to keep them engaged and plugged in as much as we can, but essentially – if somebody shows up on the street – if they can swim freestyle or backstroke and have a valid checking account – as you said – they can essentially join our team.

FROM AUDIENCE - Question: You were discussing when to move a child up, but now what if you had a 10 year old girl who is swimming with the 8 year olds – when do you move her up with the rest of her peers?

BRANDON: The way that our team is structured – those groups are pretty fluid and we do not necessarily have a 10 and under group between 8 and 10. They can go back between those two groups. What we won't do is move a 10 year old up into the 11 year old group so we do try to cluster those kids as much as they can in their own social group. We are very aware of that and we just try to do the best we can in terms of making sure that they are with their friends. We have had occasions where we have actually moved kids from their neighborhood pools to other pools because there were more kids in their age group there so they could have a better time. Does that answer your question?

TOM: You know – maybe the other one is somewhat similar – how do you deal with the 13 year old novice swimmer who is at the same

swimming level as your 8 or 9 year olds?? Yeah – that is a great question.

FROM AUDIENCE - If you move one athlete – an age group athlete – from one neighborhood pool to another because we try to assign them by their neighborhoods because that is usually how we get them – they show up at their neighborhood pool – how do you prevent a mass exodus from happening?

BRANDON: I think the biggest way that we do that is that movement is initially coach instigated. Now, I am not saying that we do not have families that say “hey – we like that coach over there better, but we are very clear about no – you are at your neighborhood pool – unless there are some extraordinary circumstance and it cannot be based on that is just what the parents want to do – unless – you know – there is no way for them to possibly get there. One of the other things that we do is we actually have a transportation committee on our team so if there are issues for kids to get around to these different sites – which it is – when you start splitting families up because your headquarters is at your main facility – That becomes an issue so you have to have a way for those parents and families to get around in a pretty easy way so we try to deal with that the best that we can.

DON: Well, I was just going to make a couple of comments to that because we have dealt with that a lot over the years. I think that it has got to be explained to the parent and to the child – what is in the best interest of your swimming and your psychological state? Some kids would be devastated to swim down. If you explain it – some kids understand it – that it is a better learning environment and eventually they will do better in the long-term so I would constantly stay in touch with that kid if they are swimming in a lower age group – how are things going? How do you feel? Are you progressing? Are you comfortable? If they say yes, I would allow that, but if they said you know – I really want to get back with my peer group then I would explain the consequences of that – that the workouts may be a little bit more challenging and that it may affect your technique and efficiency, but I think communication with a kid is the main thing and where is the best position

for them for their development as a swimmer and as a person so it is constant communication.

BRANDON: We have a special group that we have created for that called our Senior Rec. Group where if they want to come in and essentially work on fitness or eventually be on our senior team we do our best to actually stick them next to our senior kids so that they are with their peer group now. It doesn't always work, but we have an opportunity for them to do that and again – to add to what he said – communicating what the expectations are for – when they come in and they realize how far they are behind everybody else in their own age groups so that they know what to expect and they are not completely freaked out and want to run out the door that first day – that is huge. You have to constantly talk with them and hopefully - they are old enough and aware enough and cognizant enough that they can make their own choices with that.

FROM AUDIENCE - Question: How do you deal with attendance requirements? There may be a couple of practices a week as younger swimmers, and as they get older they are required to come more, correct? If you don't come what happens?

SHERRY: In Southern California Swimming we have several different levels - contrary to National Age Group Swimming. We have our own set of standards that used to be A, B, and C and now they are blue, red and white which is our own set of time standards – as well as we have what is called the SCS Senior Development time. All of the time standards that are by age group are certain meets that you are allowed to attend. Then the next level to go to is to swim at the SCS Senior Development level and we have a championship each year for that and then beyond that is to go to Senior Level Swimming. On our team - your attendance determines which level of meets you can go to. If you only come as a 13 or 14 year old three times a week then you can only swim – we only allow you to represent us at an age group level – age group classification meet. If you wish to do more than that as a 13 or 14 year old and you move into one of the senior

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groups – then you have to commit to so many practices a week to be able to do that. Granted, some weeks you may have a test – you may get sick, but we keep daily attendance and your attendance – your basis of attendance determines what level of meets that you may compete at and that is a standard policy on our team so if you come and you don't do that – then you do not get to go to the meet. I mean – you are Junior National level and start coming three times a week you will not compete at even the senior circuit of meets in Southern California until you bring your attendance back to where it should be to attend – to represent us and yourself at that level of a competition.

TOM - One question that we kind of danced around, but didn't quite answer straight out is - How do you determine when to move up a swimmer? Is it strictly by age? Is it by ability? What do you use – what kind of factors and criteria do you use for move ups?

JOHN: Well, I am guessing most teams are like this. Even though we don't have it written down – there are some minimum criteria that we have for each group – even though ours isn't etched in stone – so maybe to move up to the age group program – you might have to do eight 100 frees on 1:45 or some type of base interval that we know that you are going to survive. You are going to make the sets. We do make exceptions if a kid is especially talented in one stroke versus another – you might have a kid coming up that is a – I just actually got an email yesterday while I am here – about a 13 year old that wants to move up to our senior program and I know by any objective measure we shouldn't move her up because she is just a God awful freestyler, but I think she is going to be a good breaststroker so I am going to let her move up – based on the fact that she is 13. She needs to increase the volume of her training and she is kind of a one trick pony, but she could turn out to be a very, very good breaststroker some day so we are going to let her go up, but usually – regardless of age – we pretty much need to know that this kid is going to be able to make the sets and not get

in the way or just feel destroyed when she goes home every night.

MICHAEL: Every single mistake that I have made in move-ups over the past number of years has resulted from my moving somebody up early – too soon – because of pressure from parents or pressure from the swimmer and I would reiterate what John said – if a swimmer can't do the work – you are not doing him any favors by putting them up into that upper group – even if he is with his peers. Who wants to be around your peers when they are kicking your butt up and down the pool every single repeat of every single set? So, when I do have a swimmer who wants to move up – really wants to move up – it is the only thing in life they care about, but they are only going to come to practice twice a week – you know – we have a talk about okay – you want to go up into that next group – this is what they do and when you show me A. that you are committed enough to come to practice enough and can make the improvements that they are going to and B. that you can make ten 100's free on 1:20 – ten 100's backstroke on 1:25 - you know – whatever it is. On our team we do not do a lot of freestyle. We pretty much do 25% of each stroke so kids learn really early that they have to be pretty good at everything. Some of them just walk pigeon-toed and cannot do breaststroke to save their lives and you know – that is a little bit different, but for the most part – they know that they are going to be training all four strokes and they had better be able to train all four strokes well so we don't have the one stroke swimmer on our team so it really hasn't been much of a problem.

SHERRY: I think that going from our age group program to our senior program – the #1 criterion is that it has to be the swimmer's wish – not the parents wish. We have a lot of parents in our area – a lot of high end academic private schools that parents want them to do more than maybe what the child wants to do – that is #1. #2 – they have to be able to handle the next level workout and what we try to do is give them an introductory period. Instead of

listening to a parent pontificate about what they can and they think their child can and can't do – we put them in – see if they can handle it. You are in a trial – two weeks you are going to come to this workout three times for two weeks so six workouts and we will evaluate after that to see if you feel like you can handle it. If they are in the way of other people – inhibiting workout – it becomes very apparent. Unfortunately for the child – sometimes it is debilitating, but it is the truth serum of whether they really can handle it or not and whether they really want to do this or not. The other thing – to move to our senior group once they are 13 they have to commit to one morning a week to be able to stay in the senior group. When they are 14 – two mornings a week. When they are 15 – three mornings a week and then and/or if they make Juniors or Seniors prior to that then they set up a schedule with my husband as to what training they are going to do, but those things play into it and once their attendance falls below a certain level – then they understand that they might be moved backwards because it is about coaching to the top end and helping every swimmer reach their full potential in Senior Swimming which should be the end result after they have started as an age group swimmer so we work on those steps along that way.

BRANDON: We do have certain test sets that we have for each one of our age groups, except for at the very top end. That is – again – based a lot more on the athlete and whether they think they are ready – they have to come to us and discuss that with us. Again, the test sets are the beginning and in particular, we will do a set for example – to move into our highest age group it is thirty 100's on 1:30 short course. Part of the set is the coach cannot count for them nor help them. They have to be able – I mean – we can be there to encourage them, but they have to be able to read the clock – know where they are at. If people fall off in their lane they have to be able to step off and keep moving so that is as much part of the test as anything. It is the mental test. Are they really

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“SwimAmerica is a must for every swim coach. When I started our SwimAmerica program in 1992, I had four goals. 1. Create a swim lesson program that is far superior to the lessons being offered in our area at the time. 2. Create a feeder program for our club team. 3. Supplement my own income. 4. Provide an opportunity for our high school and college swimmers to earn money without disrupting their training schedule. The SwimAmerica program moves swimmers along in simple, easy to follow levels that teaches kids to swim the competitive strokes quickly and efficiently. While not all swimmers, will join our club, they will all know the most efficient way to swim. As for my goals, Swim With Bill, LLC offers the best lessons in the area, with 70 kids from our lesson program joining our club team in the last year. Our high school and college swimmers can teach lessons between swim practices, which allows them to earn money without disrupting their training regimen. As for my own income (which is greatly enhanced due to the swim lesson program), 80% comes from the lesson program. The lesson program has also allowed us to supplement some of our coaches salaries by having them work extra hours as supervisors in our lesson program. A head coach running a SwimAmerica program makes perfect sense. I can not imagine our club program without it!”

- Bill Schalz, Schalz Swim School, Inc., Aurora, IL

“SwimAmerica has allowed us to create the perfect feeder program for our competitive program, McGuire Aquatic Club. Each year we have over 20 lesson swimmers graduate to the swim team. These swimmers enter our team already knowing the proper technique and terminology on their first day. SwimAmerica provides us with an opportunity to reach out to families who are new and unsure of proper swimming technique. We run SwimAmerica and our swim team at the same time in the same pool. Our parents love having the “one stop shop” for all of their children. We have noticed a number of families stay and watch the older swimmers and comment how their lesson child can get to that level. SwimAmerica has provided us coaches with a stable means of additional income. We have increased our coaches salaries by up to 30% since we began our lesson program. Any coach who is serious about coaching as a profession needs to have SwimAmerica as their lesson program. A National Program, Created by Coaches for Coachess!!!”

- Brian McGuire, Head Coach, McGuire Aquatic Club, Rockton IL

ready because you are not going to be able to babysit all those kids who are transitioning. You are trying to get those kids ready to be in the senior group – well, there is a certain amount of fitness involved in that and if they are always asking everybody – well, what number are we on or this or that – it is not going to work that well. Of course – there is a learning curve, but again – that is part of the test and a lot of kids take three or four times to do it, but it is about them coming to you and saying – “hey, I am ready for this test.” You kind of say – well alright – let’s give it a shot. Well, if they make three 100’s they know that they have a long way to go there. That is just one of our tests.

I think one of the biggest things is the commitment level and consistency. One of the things that we really try to enforce is that consistency is the key – slow and steady wins the race over the long haul. I mean – it is not – I am not putting down sprinters by any means, but in the terms of your entire career – consistency is the key so we really try to enforce that and when they can be more consistent at practice – then that is the appropriate time to have the discussion – especially about moving into from age group to senior.

TOM - Question: Along that line – When do you make move-ups? Can they do it in the middle of a season or is it done basically only at the end or the beginning of a new season?

BRANDON: We just try to do it twice a year the best we can unless we have somebody move in from out of town. We try to do it the beginning of the next season so that they are prepared or preparing themselves for that during the previous season. They kind of know what the expectations are and it sort of works out better with dues and structures and all that stuff anyway, okay? It is not perfect, but it works pretty well.

JOHN: What we try to do is whenever a parent asks for this I basically say the mistake I don’t want to make is putting your kid up – have them fail and move them down so my goal is to never move a kid back down a group because that – I just think

that is not a good thing. That just bodes for a bad future and they are just going to feel defeated and feel terrible about themselves so the only time I will actually let a kid move up mid-season is when you have one of those borderline kids and you tell the parent – look – we will start them in the lower group and we will watch their progress – especially during a short course season which is so much longer than our long course season – I will – you know – after two months say – look – maybe we could have moved the kid up. I will admit that I might have made a mistake or just been a little too conservative to make sure if I err on the conservative side and keep them down and then move the child up mid-season I think that is acceptable. We also have the advantage in that sometimes we can let the kids kind of cross-train a little bit – you know – if the lanes are contiguous in lane 2 – there is a pre-senior group in lane 3 there is a senior group – maybe for the breaststroke set we will move them up and try it out so they get a feel for that.

TOM: So, you are saying as needed?

JOHN: As needed and yeah – I don’t make a strict thing saying it is twice a year or once a year because again – I will admit that I made a mistake, but usually when we make a mistake it is because we don’t want a disaster. We don’t want to hold a kid back – send him back down to 2nd grade because it is kind of demeaning. You know – I don’t want to be in that kid’s shoes when they go back to the pre-senior group after being a senior for a week. That would be a tough thing.

DON: I just want to add a couple of thoughts on that – again – I would just reiterate – it has to be comprehensive. I think the maturity – the efficiency of the swimmer – the focus on detail – obviously their ability to train and I think the last thing really is the time and is it in the best interest of the swimmer from the broader perspective because we have seen this become destructive socially when kids move up too early – obviously – from a training perspective – sometimes it is the right thing to do.

The other thing that I would add is that you need to look at everybody else that is in the range of that swimmer in terms of ability because you could move somebody up and get five emails that night from parents wanting to know why their kid is not being moved up and they feel their kid is comparable so I think that is good due diligence to do prior to moving somebody up that you have gone through the range of kids and that you can justify it if you had to.

FROM AUDIENCE - Question: How do you educate your team and your swimmers about your philosophy?

DON: Well I would just say that we have and we are going to talk about this later, but we have meetings throughout the year where we talk to the parents and our emphasis is on the big picture and our commitment to their kids and their long-term development and we ask them to trust us to do the right thing and somebody may be moved up and the parent may feel that their child should be when another kid is moved up, but again – if they trust us that we are doing the right thing for their kid that maybe not moving them up is in the best interest of their kid so the parents need to let go a little bit and trust the coaching staff and know that we are trying to do the right thing.

JOHN: Yeah – I would like to add something to that. Again – I have had something like that too. That is perfect what you said – one kid moves up and you get five emails. I call it program inflation because then everything is kind of shifted. Your age group program is really your junior program. I look around and I go – those aren’t seniors. We are calling them seniors. We are billing them as seniors, but they are not seniors. One hint I would like to give you guys if you do have a coach-owned program which I have which is the best thing that has ever worked for me in a situation like this is you look the parent in the eye and say, look – I could easily move your kid up and not have to fight with you and charge you an extra \$400 a season so how convinced do you think

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I am that your kid shouldn't move up because that \$400 in a coach-owned program is my money so I am saying - I really think it is in the best interest of your child to stay a pre-senior and I am giving up \$400 of my own money because that is how strongly I feel about it and that sells a lot of the parents, but if you are at a Y or you know - it might not work.

TOM: Jennifer?

FROM AUDIENCE - JENNIFER: Sherry. Thanks for the use of - about your use of transition. I have used transitions a lot. Do you ever use them longer than two weeks? I have never done it that way - I really like that.

SHERRY: Sometimes. This last year we had a group of boys that were - they are all now 13 - as 12 year olds I had six boys that were Top 10 in the Nation and in three or more strokes and they were all growing quickly and were all going to be 13 by this summer. Actually one of them was 13 last summer and is now 14 and in their growth and transition they had really kind of outgrown my group physically, but mentally they were not really ready to handle training with the older guys so - and we had two girls that were the same way - 13 - ready to move on - made sectionals last summer as 12 year olds, but really weren't ready to be in the social 15 - 16 whatever group that were swimming with my husband so what we opted to do from the fall until they turned 13 for the boys or for the girls until we thought it was ready - two to three times a week they would train - depending upon what my husband was doing training wise - they would train with the older kids. Wednesdays he usually does dive sets so they do a warm-up and then they get up and go two for ones or one to one ratio, etc., with and that sort of thing there as much social interaction because they are just getting up and racing and if they only did one thing a week they did that so that they were actually getting a taste of what the next level group was going to be doing, but they were not necessarily in the pool in between sets, talking to each other, etc.

I would say now with the implementation and the wide use of

Facebook - if you look at our kids on our team - our college kids are Facebook friends with our 10 year olds that have Facebook so some of that isn't as big a divide as it was before, but we really try to keep that separate. So for them we did a little bit longer and to be honest with you - the boys did it and came when it was time for them to quote/unquote move into the Senior Group and said, "Can I stay with you for the summer - I just don't think I am ready" and we talk about it. We work with them and their parents and help them understand because the mental portion is as important as or more important than any of the physical portion - especially if you are looking at a 12 or 13 year old boy that you want to make sure that they stay in the sport.

TOM: I am going to move into season planning and evaluation.

Question: Do you have a set progression plan for each group?

BRANDON: What we have is a general curriculum in terms of - again - if you are stepping back longitudinally and you want to figure out where you want your athletes to be when they leave your program - everything has to be based on that - going all the way backwards through your lesson program - the beginning of your lesson program so what we try to do is emphasize you know - kicking or stroke work is fun in this particular group and add skills, racing technique, racing skills as we move along with that in addition to that - fitness and dry-land so there is a curriculum that is set out there that is very basic and at our weekly coaches' meetings or bi-weekly coaches' meetings we sit down and we go over specific sets or drills that we want to see happen during the month or whatever.

SHERRY: Because, as I said, our team is so small and our coaching staff is so small, some of our coaching meetings are sitting at the dinner table after we have gone home after workout - observing what everybody else - looking across and seeing what has happened in the different lanes. A long time ago my husband instituted a program whereas in the fall he does a

- we hand out a Gold Packet to each of our swimmers - including the younger swimmers and then the younger swimmers meet in a group - the novice level kids - with my daughter who is their coach. My swimmers and my husband's swimmers - we set up a half an hour goal- setting or goal session with them which their parents are able to attend if they wish. My husband keeps everything - as do I - in a notebook. We take notes throughout that on what they wish to do and accomplish in their seasons and then each year when they come back we add - you pull out - what did you say you wanted to do last year? We did this, this and this. You were able to accomplish this. Bring in the attendance requirement - their times in practice, etc., to be able to show them and show us whether they were actually doing it or bagging it or whatever for sets and it helps us evaluate. When you look at that then we are able to determine how we are going to set our planning for the team and see and as I said - we coach to the top level. We want them to reach their full potential eventually in senior swimming or at the collegiate level and everything is geared towards that and we have it in writing so they can look at it year to year or if they decide to meet throughout the year - if they come in and do that then they can look and see what they have stated or said they wanted to do and basically it comes back on them for their own responsibility to take responsibility for their own swimming.

DON: I would just say our program is a little more openended. We try to evaluate three main things on an ongoing basis. One is their technical development and discipline and from everything from streamlining - how far off each wall when they are fatigued to executing stroke drills correctly from a training perspective - their discipline and effort in practice and from a leadership, maturity and character perspective on an ongoing basis and we talk to the kids regularly about how they are doing in those regards. We obviously have test sets we follow, but those are really the three broad areas that kids have to improve in to develop and we make sure they know how they are doing on an ongoing basis.

TOM - Question: When they say that they know how they are doing – what does that mean? Is it written – are you telling the kids - how do you do that?

DON: We have a lot of one on one dialogue with kids. We will pull kids out of the water. We will meet with them before practice – after practice, but we are very interactive and it is all verbal. The kids know exactly how we evaluate how they are doing and they should be able to articulate for themselves how they are doing. I mean – to be honest with you – if somebody is young and immature we tell them that you are immature and you need to mature and you need to demonstrate more leadership and this is how I would recommend that you do that. If somebody is not disciplined in terms of technique in training we tell them specifically what they are not doing that they need to do and the kids respond really well and they will start checking back in with us and ask us if they are doing a better job and ask for feedback.

SHERRY: I just want to add one thing – in the last year – one of the things that we have added – almost every day in practice they do something for time and when they get out of the pool they have to record their times as they exit the pool on a sheet and that gets put into their file for them so that they know what their times should be the next time they do the same thing and when they are getting ready to do sets where they have to perform by time it is printed so that they have their times right in front of them so they have to try to perform at that level or better the next time for whatever and somebody will get up and have a really good day and go really fast and then they will walk in and go oh my gosh – now I have to do 10 of those at this time, but it makes them be accountable for that and then again – if you have a parent that comes to you and says you know – why didn't my kid swim faster – you pull it out and say – this is what they did in practice so this is how they performed at the meet and it is a great checks and balances system to be able to evaluate performance at race level.

MICHAEL: Now I kind of start – because I coach most of the kids in the program from 8 up – you know – I know what I want my perfect senior swimmer to be and I know what I want

my senior A's to be able to do from the moment they step into that group and then working backwards so I have a good idea in the three basic areas of our training program whether it is the technical, the physical – physiological whatever or the mental – I know what I want my ideal swimmer to look like and I try to reverse engineer from the moment they step on as 8 year olds and I think I mentioned this a little bit earlier – that when you start the brainwashing process very early and you get your 8 year olds thinking that they are World Beating Studs and you know – they can do anything – they will do anything you ask – BOY – it is a lot easier to get them to do the technical things right. It is a lot easier to get them to work hard and to – with any luck – work a little smart at the same time, but I have a general idea of what I want to see and then we work backwards and just go step by step as kids get a little older.

TOM: Michael, since you have now been – I think you are starting your third year, correct? At York?

MICHAEL: I have finished three years.

TOM - Question: Okay. So, basically – you know – when you say that you have this picture of what you want – you know – your Senior A athletes to look like – I don't mean this in any disrespect to the coach that was there before you, but did you have some groups that were in your mind empty because they didn't meet the criteria that you had?

MICHAEL: The criteria were definitely different and I came from a certain background of coaching and from certain expectations and the levels were not where I wanted them to be so it was kind of rough sledding.

What type of season planning do you use for the age group program?

MICHAEL: Not nearly as detailed as for a senior because everything is aerobic for the most part - we do a little fast stuff. We do a lot of technique work but 99% of their work is aerobic, but we do a lot of tweaking from one meet to the next. After every meet I sit down with the Hy-Tek results and I take a look at – you know – pretty detailed – how we did – what we did well – what we didn't. I try and remember as best I can what are some

of the patterns that I saw – both that I did like and that I didn't and then we kind of tweak for that next month accordingly. That doesn't mean we make any major changes in the overall plan, but it just means that Oh my God – our under water's were terrible. We need to do a little more work on that this week or this next month and see if next time we can't do a little better or oops – our breaststrokes were not so good so we do tweaking like that, but that is all within the egis of the major plan.

BRANDON: What we try to do is sit down and look at – first off – gender – what we think their predisposition is at that age in terms of where we think they might end up. We do not want to pigeonhole them too young. To be honest, most of what we do is very aerobic – I would say 92% of what we do is very aerobic. We do touch on fast things and try to develop energy systems as age appropriate, but really what we are doing is sitting down trying to look at that and figure out the right recipe – again – looking back and stepping back almost as a project manager and looking down where you want it to end up – how does that fit into the rest of your program. How are you getting them ready to move up to the next level if they don't have an aerobic base and they can't kick and all the other things that they need to be a senior swimmer – your season plan does not mean much. At the same time – again – kind of tweaking it – a season plan is that it is a plan – it is pathway, but do not ever be afraid to make changes from that – it is not set in stone and you need to learn from it and be creative and talk to other coaches and learn as much as you can and not jumping on the bandwagon of somebody that is a flash in the pan being successful. Always be open-minded to what other people are doing to make sure that you can adjust your plan and get the most out of it.

TOM - Question: How do you evaluate whether you had a successful season or not?

DON: Well, I would just follow up a little bit. I think that – and I would also answer this in the backdrop of our community – which I alluded to earlier – has literally thousands of

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summer league swimmers and that environment is very short term race oriented, high anxiety and when the kids go year around they carry that with them and so do the parents so they are always focusing on the next meet and if the next meet is a shaved meet the anxiety level goes up so a big part of our process is to try and unwind that and get them to think long-term and more developmental - lengthen their strokes out, be efficient and not get so caught up in every meet and every race, but to evaluate meets and races - even shaved meets - just in the context of development. So, in terms of how we evaluate a successful meet or a successful season - it really is more in the bigger picture and not in a race or a meet - it is what they are doing in workout and their general development and they need to understand that and so do the parents - otherwise - this thing gets pretty intense and pretty heavy for young kids.

SHERRY: I look at things a little bit differently. I am happy at the end of the season if my kids go best times in the things that they wish to go best times in, but my goal is for them to be able to swim every single thing. We only rest - my age group kids only rest about twice a year - otherwise - they train hard all the time. We spend the beginning of each season after we have rested when we come back and now here in the fall when we start back - spending between 3-5 days working on building each of the strokes - to build to an IM. They all have to swim IM. They all have to swim as a 12 year old the 400 IM. They all have to swim a distance race - as long as they qualify time standard wise in our competitions to be able to do that. Nobody is a specialist at anything until they get to be 13 or older. It is very, very important that they all do the same type of kicking - same type of drilling - same type of working on streamlines off the wall, etc.

I am very old fashioned in the sense that if they do not do it right and I am standing there watching - we will do it over and we will do it over and we will do it over until they do it right because - in my knowledge - it is a waste of their time and my time

if they are going to do it and slop through it and they all know that. If somebody new comes they find out very quickly because I believe that they have to build their base to be able to do whatever it is they are going to be doing when they get to be older and a 10 year old that is a great breaststroker may not be even in the ballgame as a breaststroker when they are 15 or 16 - depending upon where their body develops so they have to be able to do everything - hence our ability to score well in IMX because we make them all do all of the IMX things that they are required to do and you know - every once in a while one of those 11 year olds pops a good 400 IM and you go WOW - somebody that has been, for us, what is a red level swimmer - a B level swimmer their whole life and never been up there with the fast kids and they swim a 400 IM and all of a sudden they have got spring JO's for a 13-14 year old and they look at me and go WOW - where did that come from? Well, it is because you do everything all the time and we do that all the way through our senior program, our elite level kids come back and they have to go over re-doing all of their strokes - working on technique a minimum of a week on each stroke - building to their IM and then when we go to competitions - as I said - we do not rest very often.

My husband believes in long seasons. In his coaching career it has been very, very productive and lucrative for him at many different levels so when we go to a meet they are told what they are going to swim. They do not get to enter what they want to swim. He gives them directives - at this meet you are going to swim all the 200's of stroke - 400 IM - 500 freestyle, etc., and maybe at a different meet they are going to go 100's of stroke and the mile - whatever - but it is very directed in the result of the end of the season than by what they do throughout the season.

JOHN: That sounds pretty similar to what we try to do. Everyone swims a 400 IM. Everyone swims a 1650 and God help you if you say - I can't swim a 200 fly because - a term I like to use with our kids is "fear reduction" so the last thing you want to do is

tell me that you are afraid to swim a 400 IM or a 200 fly because then you will be swimming it at every meet because I just want our kids to train hard enough - I mean if we have them there so many hours - they shouldn't be afraid of swimming 200 meters of butterfly and there is something seriously wrong in your program if you have kids that are afraid to do that and again - everything he said - is very similar to what we do. The kids do not do their entries. The parents don't do their entries. I have seen teams where that happens and they do not show up on Friday night at the meets because that is where all the distance events are - those teams aren't there. They are not there Thursday night at the State Championships because it is the 800 free or the mile and the 800 free relay and no one is signing up for those events so I think - as age group coaches - we have to make sure that everybody can swim everything and not - you know - because kids do change and your kids that cannot swim fly at 10 that are swimming fly in college and they are no longer sprint breaststrokers. As age group coaches I think we are kind of obligated to make them do everything - even if they don't want to - even if their parents don't like seeing their kid come in last or not in the top heat. I mean - you have got a kid that is a sprint breaststroker - you could put him in that every meet, but that gets old. Eventually they will turn around and actually - what their parents thought was their favorite event because they were good at it - they will hate it by the time they are 13 or 14 because there is so much pressure on them and they are not dropping at all. That is the other nice thing about training 400 IM and throwing a kid in the 200 fly who is not a flyer - when some of their other strokes are kind of plateauing - they can at least come home from the meet saying "at least I did a best time in my 200 fly" - you know - even if it is an annual 200 fly type of thing and we will go to meets and I do the entries and you know - if you look at the Hy-Tek reports or if you ever get the matrix report you will see a whole column filled in with x's - it is like - Oh God - I put every kid in the 200 fly and the 400 IM at this meet and

nobody is in the 50 and that is just the way it goes, but I am an age group coach so that is what I consider myself and I think that is how we are helping these kids become senior swimmers.

BRANDON: I would say generally I am pretty happy with this season – if you look at the data and the overall trend says that – you know – 75% of your swimmers have gotten better. Certainly we have that data – the raw data – we can all look at that through Hy-Tek. I think more importantly – I am very happy if our IM’s and our longer freestyles are good – especially at this age – I am very happy then. If those are off – I am generally not a very happy coach – I don’t think that I have done my job well and also I am pretty happy if you can look back and say that at the end of your championship meet – all those kids raced hard. You can tell when somebody is racing hard or wants to get to the wall first and has thought about what you have taught them all season long – whether to get their fingertip on the wall first or put their head down as the flag – if they have raced hard and you can tell that that is progress – is my opinion. I think finally, but certainly not the least important – to sit down with each athlete and say “how did you feel about your season?” and ask them what they could have done differently and hope that you are getting that in their brain over and over again that they are in charge of their own destiny and it is about consistency in their own thought process and understanding that process and there is no magic wand you are going to throw at them – you only give them opportunity - just reinforcing that over and over again.

TOM - Question: This kind of goes along with the next question – you kind of mentioned talking with each athlete about how they are doing. Do any of you do any individual swimmer evaluations at the end of the year?

BRANDON: I try to sit down with every swimmer and talk with them and go over the data with them and their races and talk about it and trying to formulate – I try to do this at the end of the season and then again at the beginning of the next season so it gives them a little bit of time – if there is a break – to think about the direction they want to head or to be

able to maybe come back with some goals in mind and you can maybe help them solidify those goals a little bit – yeah – we do that with everybody.

MICHAEL: One thing I really like about Hy-Tek is that if you press the right buttons in the right order you can get a print out that shows you the last however many seasons or even years worth of meet results all in one page. It is just wonderful so you can get a big picture in one page and I go over those pretty extensively to see what we have really been doing because sometimes when you are at the end of a season you can only remember the last few weeks or whatever. This allows me to see 6 months – a year - 2 years – whatever and you can see patterns and trends which I think are really, really important and then also – before I talk about or before a swimmer and I will talk about goals per se – you know – I will ask them – and I did this with my senior group last week - okay – I want each of you to think about it and make a list of what are the things that are keeping you or have kept you from getting to the next level of performance. Okay? That is a long-winded way of asking you for what are your strengths and weaknesses, but it really puts it into perspective for them. Okay – you are at a certain level of performance. You have wanted to get to here – why aren’t you there already? You know – what specifically has kept you from being better? And we kind of go from the results of those – of their thinking and their making lists – okay – well this is what we are really going to work on this coming year and from listening to Michael Bohl this morning – I mean – it looks like he did exactly the same thing with Stephanie Rice. We want to take down Katie Hoff – here is the data – how do we do it?

TOM - Question: I am going to throw you all a curveball question that you do not know is coming. None of you do written evaluations for your swimmers – is that correct?

MICHAEL: I do. Not for every single person on the whole team, but for certain groups.

Short course season or long course season?

Long course season. It is more important after long course.

TOM: Okay, question. It is kind of along the lines of evaluating the season and also setting season goals. You know – we were talking about that your team size is generally around a hundred to a hundred and twenty swimmers or John – in your case – seventy or so – so Sherry – in southern California there are about 120 or so – 115 teams – 25 teams have more than 200 swimmers. You have one club that has more than 400 and one more than 500, one more than 600 and one more than 700 kids. In Pacific Swimming Don – you have three teams. Those three teams have over 3,000 swimmers. You know – one is 900 – one is 1,000 and one is 1,100 and there are 19 teams with 200 or more swimmers and Middle Atlantic Michael there are nine teams over 200 swimmers.

Question: What do you do in terms of focusing the team on what you can perform on as opposed to sometimes almost getting – I don’t know if lost is the right word, but just almost overwhelmed with some of the team sizes that you have to compete against in Championship meets?

SHERRY: That is real easy for us. When we started and we couldn’t even swim relays. We went to competitions telling our athletes – because we didn’t have enough people to swim relays in different age groups because Southern California’s Swimming Age Group is all – relays are all age group oriented – that we just wanted them to perform the best they could. We have kept the same mantra – that they work on their own individual performance #1 and #2 the team goal is to step up and do better for the team on a relay than you do for yourself and for us it has been very productive. As I said, at the JO level which is the age group evaluation in Southern California Swimming over the last six or seven years we have had a team – we score men’s, women’s and combined and we have had someone in the top two – one either our men’s team or combined in the top two at both spring and summer JO’s and/or we have won at summer JO’s by using that mantra and it is not about who you swim against – it is not about what day you are swimming on – it is about getting up and swimming against the clock and if you have put the work

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in and you believe in what you have done – then you should be able to achieve. Yes, there are extenuating circumstances, but if you have put the work in and that puts the ball in their court because we can pull it out and say – you came to 60% - you came to 80% - you came to 90% because we take attendance at every single workout and these are – as I said – we write down times. They have to write down their times and if somebody cheats and writes down the wrong time – my husband has been doing this long enough in his group – he usually looks at it and say – oh – I don't think you went that – you went this and they will go oh yeah – you are right coach and so they have accountability and that accountability plus hard work produces results – not only in the pool, but we have a lot of good students so it carries over into their schooling and for us – that has worked and we have beat teams – like you said – there are teams that have 600, 500, 400 and we have 120.

DON: There are some teams in Pacific Swimming that are quite large and we have never looked to be competitive in Pacific Swimming. As a team – it is always driven individually. We have never had a meeting about trying to be in the top 5. At Far Westerns it is always about swimming as fast and as well as you possibly can and we have done pretty well. I think that sometimes when you focus too much on a team people shift the focus away from their personal responsibility and at the high school level and at the USS level we have had success, but we don't just stop there. It is challenging, but you know – if you have 500 kids on the team and you are not productive – you may not be as competitive as a team with 100 kids that are productive and that is what we try to do. The other thing that is big with our group and you may or may not be into this, but there are some things that we can control and we know we can be better at and that is the way we walk on the deck – the way we look, dress, warm-up, support each other and those things we do demand that we do better than anybody else so there are some things outside of the pool that we do aggressively go after and in terms of swimming – whether the team

is a thousand or a hundred – we just want to swim well.

TOM: Give me – I am just kind of curious – what you mean by walk, dress, warm-up better than anybody else. Can you give me – expound on that a little bit more?

DON: Well, I think that it starts with a commitment to the program and a pride in the program and the commitment to the team and if you have that then everything else falls into place and we do talk about the way you walk out of the locker room and the way you show up at a meet and what you look like. Team attire is mandatory at every meet. We tell kids – you will not swim if you are not in team attire and if you are not in team attire then that might suggest that the team is not that important to you and maybe you shouldn't be on the team so we take it that far and you know – we have been doing it for a long time and so when we show up at a meet we want 50 kids to be in team attire and to be there on time and to be positive and stretch together and warm up together and support each other at the other end of the pool and again – whether you are 50, 100 or 1,000 – you can do that well and those are things that we demand and the kids – they embrace.

SHERRY: I agree with him. We have a policy – we actually have an honor code that we ask every swimmer to sign and their parents have to sign it at the beginning of each year – that states that they will represent us in a positive light and any behavior that does not represent us in a positive light would cause them to not be a member of the team anymore. Team Policy: They have to be in team suit, team cap and a T-shirt when they are on the deck at a meet and we only warm up as a team. They are not allowed to get in and warm up on their own so they do a controlled, supervised warm up and if they are not in team uniform they are not allowed to compete for us. It is a proven fact that when they are in a uniform – Walt Disney used to say when they had kids come to senior night at Disneyland that he wanted them dressed a certain way because then they behave in a

certain way and societal implications show that that is the truth so when they are dressed as a team and representing it as a team – then they tend to cheer for each other, be more supportive, etc. so I agree with him 100%. It works for us.

MICHAEL: Also, with regard to – well – you might not be winning JO's or Nationals because you just don't have the numbers. We look to improvement – not only individuals, but also the team. If we got 8th last year – we want to move up 3 or 4 spots this time and a number of years ago Mark Schubert gave a talk at ASCA and said one of the things he paid attention to at major meets wasn't necessarily who won, but what was the most impressive team? Who did you really notice and we want to be that team. We want to be the team whose kids are improving the most – whose strokes look really good – whose kids will race their guts out that coaches afterwards will say, WOW – you know – your they really were impressive this time because I know that I have gotten home from a number of big meets and there has been a team that has just steamrolled over everybody else, but they didn't swim well. They didn't improve. They just had more numbers than we did or than anybody else did. You know – I want to get a bunch of kids in the finals. I want them improving like crazy and looking really good.

FROM AUDIENCE - Question: It is pretty clear that all 5 of your teams are competitive teams. One of the things about our team is that we have probably have half of the people on our team compete – both in USA Swimming and in Y League and I wanted to get ideas for how to create a positive, competitive team atmosphere without requiring competition as a part of being on a swim team?

JOHN: Yeah, I would like a shot at that. I almost think that it can't be done. I have had parents that would come up to me and want to sign their child up and say, "well, we want our kid to train, but we don't want her to swim in any meets" and I would look at the parent and say, "well, I don't think

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that is going to work. I don't think your kid is going to work that hard in practice – anymore than a high school student would study that hard in the history class if there was not going to be a final exam. I think unless they are being tested or challenged they are just not going to put the same amount of energy into it – it is just human nature so I think the best thing you can do is make sure that these kids do have a final exam occasionally or – how hard can you expect them to work? It is just too abstract for a kid to put in that type of work if they are never going to be tested.

DON: Alright, I just want to add a couple of things. There are two issues that you are dealing with and I agree completely – you are either create a positive environment for everybody – which is going to bring down the competitive kids to more of a social level so you are either going to say the hundred of us are going to have a positive environment – which by definition is going to be predominantly non-competitive because you are not going to be training together for a common goal or you are going to be competitive and move kids in that direction, but I think you would be doing that to the detriment of the kids at a higher level that want to compete and want to develop and honestly – at a minimum – if you have a swim team – I would say to some degree – you have to be competitive – whether it is one 50 a month and I guarantee you – they will start increasing that level, but I agree completely. I am not sure that is possible.

BRANDON: I am not sure that I can answer your question to your satisfaction, but one of the things that we do is to introduce kids to competition that are not used to it yet or haven't started anything, but once a month we have an inner-club meet with all of our sites and we purposely do that on a night when all of our groups are at our main headquarters so that when the novice parents and kids walk into that pool there is a swim team factory going on. There is dry land going on over here. There are six lanes of training here. There are parents setting up for a meet on the other end. There is a barbecue

going on on the other side so that they understand that it can be fun and competition can be fun and it can be low pressure, but we put all those on ourselves and again – we have an extraordinary group of parents that do that once a month and take that very seriously so it is an impressive site and going back to the uniforms and presence and things like that – all of those things are very important and have to be very well scripted and you have to know what you want it to look like. Does that answer your question? It does.

TOM - Question: Do you have any favorite drills that you feel best help age group athletes move to the senior level? I am not sure how we are going to totally describe them verbally, but let's take a shot at it I guess.

DON: I would just generally say that beyond the specific drills we do a lot of stroke count – a lot of stroke count – a lot of underwater work and then we phase into stroke rate and we have seen kids develop quickly with that type of training so I would just – if you are not doing it – to start with stroke counts per lap – distance under water and then add stroke rates. We have breaststrokers – even the middle age group kids with a minimum distance underwater on pull-downs – four black lines if you have the cross lines half way aggressively and then a stroke count – maybe 5 strokes per lap. When they can do that and hold their stroke then we put them on a stroke rate – a tempo trainer to try and hold the stroke count with a rate so we do a lot of that stuff so that is not specific stroke drills, but on the stroke drill side we have drill progressions that we do with kids from sculling body position to kicks, stroke drill, full stroke and the kids should know the drill progressions and they should also know personally what they are working on in each stroke.

BRANDON: I think for us it is really looking at what drills they are going to be doing in the senior group and preparing them for those drills so we sort of take our cues from there and again – we let the head coach set the curriculum – working with our head age group coach so that there is a

progression into that. I would say in general – most of our drills have to do with kick integration drills – since we are working so much on kicking – so now how do you transfer your kicking into swimming so that you can use that throughout your workout – you know – in particular – how do you go from negative split kicking to negative split swimming and the transitions in between. That is a very general way for us to look at.

SHERRY: We do a lot of the same drills in our age group program that we do in our senior program, but we do a lot of basics and fundamentals and then build from there so they are going to do the basic and fundamental breaking it down. I believe in doing parts to a whole instead of whole to parts so we do a lot of parts to a whole – breaking the stroke apart and then build and if we are going to do a stroke we spend a half an hour of practice and it is really hard for my husband to give up a half hour of training, but he will do it a couple of times – really hard, but he will do that to work on muscle memory – to help not only the age group kids do portions of it – the senior kids do more and basically picking a stroke a week or two strokes a week and integrating that into training more into warm-up. His group does a long warm up before they do anything and in that every single day in practice his group does some sort of drill for one of the strokes or for all four IM strokes, but it is very specific. They go about 3,000 warm up before they get into anything basic and of that – minimum of a thousand of it is technique work every single day. We have incorporated underwater video and so he looks at it – pulls them out – talks to them about it to help them work on that and the younger kids get to see that and know that they are going to be working towards that.

JOHN: Yeah, I agree with what Don had said about stroke count and stroke length. A fun thing to do with little kids – if you want to get them swimming like senior swimmers and to get a laugh out of them is to go up to a 7 year old and you tell them – just stop swimming like an 8 and under and they will look at you all puzzled –

like what are you taking about – I am 7, but it gets them thinking and you show them the other – in our situation – the other side of the pool where the kids are swimming differently and so you want to show them where they have to be in a few years and to go along with that – one of my favorites if you want to get into a specific stroke drill and I wouldn't even call it a drill, but we do a lot of breaststroke kicking where we go two kicks per pull – just to keep things really long. I do not know if that is hurting me in terms of developing 50 breaststrokers when they are 9 and 10 years old, but I do know we produce a lot of 200 breaststrokers and kids that can split in the 400 IM so you know – again – stroke length – stroke count – just like Don said – I think that is great for little kids to learn.

MICHAEL: With our program we really don't do very many stroke drills. We do a lot of full stroke swimming, but with each stroke I have a fairly short list of focus points that I want everybody to be able to do that when put together will lead to a perfect butterfly or a perfect backstroke or whatever. They change a little bit here and there from season to season, but you know – all in all – they have stayed fairly stable so we do a lot of technical work, but we do not do a lot of drills. We just try and do a lot of really pretty swimming and in particular with age groupers – we do a lot more work on distance per stroke than we do on stroke rate. I am very careful about bringing stroke rates into it because as soon as they start picking up they start shortening so you know – we will really work on the efficiency – defined as how many strokes they are taking per length and then we also just look at how they race. You know - I want to see some nice – fairly even split. People aren't swimming terribly slowly the third 50 or the third quarter of every race and that they know how to get their hand on the wall quick.

FROM AUDIENCE - Question: If you work on technical issue without doing drills – do you show your group of kids this is what I want it to look like. I want you to make it look like that the best you can?

MICHAEL: Well first, I would ask you how do you get them to swim a perfect freestyle by doing a drill right, okay? It is easier to get them to do a

perfect freestyle by having them do freestyle and having them work on certain skills within that complicated whole. We do break the stroke down into – I wouldn't say parts, but at least stroke skills and I go over with each group and not just once – fairly regularly – exactly what those points are that we work on – exactly what we mean when I use the key words so that I do not have to explain it at length every single time. I can just say 2 words and they know exactly what to do and we tell them why and we watch a lot of elite athlete video – both out of water and underwater so that we can see how Michael Phelps does butterfly and how he exemplifies every one of those focus points. Natalie Coughlin doing butterfly – Jessica Schipper doing you know – whatever – so that the kids have seen over and over and over how the top kids are really common and we always talk about how individual these people's strokes are and you know – that may be right – they slightly differ, but they share 99% of their technical DNA and the difference between Jessica Schipper and Mary Descenza's stroke is almost nothing when you compare their stroke with an 8 year olds.

FROM AUDIENCE - Question: If you are introducing a new drill – how do you introduce it? Do you do it on consecutive days? Do you do it one drill backstroke one day and another drill the next day? How do you incorporate that?

SHERRY: I will answer this one. We do – as I stated earlier – we start our seasons and after we rest for a competition – come back by hitting our technique and drill work pretty intensely and we do the same stroke for maybe three or four days in a row – making corrections. One of the things he asked – how do you do drills and try to do it correctly – we do a lot of – as I said before - we use And we do a lot of paddles and fins work with In research of finding we have been very fortunate to have very, very, very few swimmers that end up with shoulder problems and in a distance based program I guess you would say that is probably an anomaly, but in our work with a couple of orthopedists that used to swim – one of the things that they stated was that if you have someone that has a problem – the first thing you do is put paddles on them and

it is like – why would you do that? If you put paddles on and take all the straps off, except for the finger strap. They have to do it correctly with the paddle on or the paddle comes off and if you put fins on it raises their buoyancy level in the water in doing any of those strokes so that they are more simulating what they would look like racing and if you film it underwater you can see that and again – if their technique is not correct then the paddle will not stay on their hand and so you find that we use the Stroke Maker paddles because they – according to the orthos – it puts less stress on their shoulders and it helps you set up doing the technical part of their stroke correctly. Then, you add a snorkel – keeping their head and their spine in line until they are basically simulating the way the stroke is supposed to be and you can work on doing technique that way so if we start out on one day and do it – just teaching the drill and the next day add some equipment and then the next day add more equipment asking them with more resistance to be able to do it correctly and we find that it tends to improve their ability to do the stroke correctly. Then you take the equipment off and keep the fins on and they can work on building stroke rate and adding the other components and you have built into a pretty decent stroke all around.

TOM - Question: What special things does your team do to facilitate retention?

DON: Well, I would say unequivocally we do have a very high retention rate and the main thing is relationships with the kids. Beyond anything else we try to do some positive things, but early in my coaching career I understood the fun issue of swimming and I think that over the years I have learned that a positive discipline environment is more productive for the long term and we do get very close to the kids on a personal level and they know that we are committed to them personally and from a swimming perspective and they stay. It is positive and not only do they stay, but they embrace the discipline so we do fun things. We have theme workouts on holidays and we do challenge Fridays and things, but I would say that from a retention

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perspective – the number 1 thing that we have seen and that has definitely worked is positive relationships with kids.

MICHAEL: I think if you can create an atmosphere where every single swimmer can get better – whether they are a B swimmer right now or a Top 10 swimmer – you are going to have a place that people want to be. So, if you can keep kids getting better – you know – not only at the meets, but also looking prettier every day – getting a little tougher every day – you know – asking them to show you their muscles or whatever and they are proud about what they look like and how strong they are and you know – you are going to have a place that kids want to be – more than they want to be at soccer practice.

BRANDON: I would like to add to that and I think for us it is really trying to model our oldest athletes and our senior athletes into what we want the rest of the team to look like and then integrating those athletes with our younger kids as much as possible. One of the things that we have done in the past is on Saturdays we will have an all-team practice after the seniors are done training where we put everybody together on relays and then the senior kids work with the younger kids after that so they are starting to see that this is something they can stay in for a long time and that it is actually a pretty cool thing to help your teammates out and be a part of your team. Another thing I mentioned before is those Wednesday night interclub meets where we are integrating people as much as possible – trying to show what the long term benefits are for your family and for you to be on the team. Swim-a-Thon is a huge, huge, huge deal for us. We are generally – I think – Top 10 in the country. For the most part it is a huge fund raiser, but one of the ways we make that important is we give incentives for raising money for Swim-a-Thon and that becomes a huge deal for us. The only way that our kids get their true uniforms is by earning them through Swim-a-Thon. You cannot buy them. We set it up – like being on the National Team. Yes, everybody can have a cap and a team

suit on their own, but their warm ups and their sweats and all that – they have a little bit different design and you have to earn it and we try to set as many things forward in the future and expose those so that when the kids see them they think – well – I want to be like that or I want to earn that when I am older. I think finally – we do a senior night which we really celebrate our seniors when they are going off to college or graduating. We do a fake Letter of Intent signing. We invite all of their parents – again – we coordinate that with those meets that we do on Wednesday night so that all the novice parents and kids are there and we encourage them to come to that so that they can see that they can be in this for a long time and what the positive outcomes can be.

SHERRY: We do some fun things. One of the things that we feel is really important is that we recognize each child on their birthday so it becomes a big deal to come to practice on their birthday – make them feel important. They are allowed to bring a snack or a treat. We went from – starting with donuts to people bringing pizza and making nachos’ and we are back to just donuts, but we pulled them out – the whole team sings to them and then it is the responsibility of every child at practice to go up and tell that person to their face – Happy Birthday and to go up etiquette-wise and tell the family thank you for whatever it is that they have brought so that we are doing something fun, but we are also teaching manners and they are being singled out and recognized on a special day that is important to them.

We do several fun things throughout the year. We do a Swim-a-Thon and we have a dinner after that. We do a couple of age group travel trips that you have to achieve and older kids are always like – oh! I wish I could still go on that – so that is it. They go on a bus with me and a couple of parents and get to be away from their parents which, as we know, is always something fun for kids. For older kids every once in a while we will give up workout and have a movie night or go out to dinner sort of thing and reserve something. We do a bowling party at Christmas time that we have like 250

to 300 people at with only 120 people on the team and we rent out a whole bowling alley for the whole evening and have teams and compete against each other and we find that that brings everyone together.

A lot of our kids on our team are involved in either Girl Scouts or Boy Scouts – working towards Eagle Scout or in National Charity Leagues so we do 2-3 philanthropic things each year which most people wouldn’t find to be fun, but tends to bring everybody together and older kids and little kids generally partner up to do this so that they kind of get to know each other and it sets an example for the younger children to learn about giving back so we do a lot of different things like that – many family-oriented things. We have restaurant nights where about once every two months the team has the opportunity to go out to dinner together. Being a smaller team, that is something we can achieve and have older and younger there together. One of our favorites is a karaoke place where we get to go and they all get to get up and sing and we will give up a workout to be able to do those types of social things so that we can kind of build that team camaraderie.

JOHN: We try to have at least one travel trip a year and I make sure it is a meet where there are no cut-off times because it seems like the elite level kids always get to travel and they have a lot of fun and they get to go all over the place, but we try to make it so even the very first year kids get to travel and we are up in the Northeast. We go to Cape Cod every winter so we are getting off-season rates. We take over the entire hotel and the kids have a blast. We also have a bunch of things we do that are kind of like team traditions, but we do them mostly around taper and kids really, really look forward to tapering – I mean in addition to the obvious reasons – because they are not training as much, but there are just some goofy things that we do during taper that they love and on deck at championships – I mean – our kids go crazy with making posters for each other and psych angle-type things and they just seem to love it and really – it builds the team camaraderie and as far as retention

goes – I mean – these kids do not want to quit because all their best friends are on the team. Especially nowadays – I mean – these kids are not 5 minutes away from the pool – they are all text messaging each other and Facebooking each other and it is really – the technology of friendships has changed over the years, but it has really helped make our team closer.

MICHAEL: Can I mention one thing that I had not mentioned before – ultimate Frisbee – 4 times a week in the summer in our morning practices – we finish the last half hour to 45 minutes with ultimate Frisbee and at first we had – you know – 10 or 15 kids at practice and as the word spread – the next thing you know we have got 40 to 50 kids at morning practice – to the point that I had to tell our 10 year olds – our 11 year olds – OK – you can come to mornings, but you can't come to evenings those days and we had enough kids that we would split them into two or even three games worth so we had an elite and a B game and a C game and goodness gracious – they loved swimming because they loved Frisbee.

FROM AUDIENCE - Question: The question is for Brandon. When they raise the money for the team, how do they get the equipment? Or was it financial money that they brought in to get the team gear.

BRANDON: It is based on finances and we have a certain level where every participant gets a T-shirt and what not and then from there you have to earn you know – your sweatshirt or your sweat pants or your gear bag or whatever and I think the goal – and I can speak only for mine and Jim's group – was \$650.00 per swimmer, but we worked pretty hard at it and we make it a big deal and it has been such a tradition for us that it is kind of in our culture now and they look forward to it and they kind of talk smack to each other and try to be – you know – the highest earner on the team and we have some great prizes that we get donated and stuff like that.

TOM - Okay, I am going to move to some questions that probably don't get asked a lot of age group coaches – not specifically to some coaching, but more lifestyle type things.

Question: What is your most satisfying moment as an age group coach?

MICHAEL: Really, it is not so much – you know – from any one swim that has happened in a meet and I think our butterfly the last year has really looked good and it is watching from the top of the stands – our kids do a fly set and it is just beautiful and that is a great feeling, so – there you go.

JOHN: Mine is a little different. One of the most satisfying things I have had as a coach is the fact that I have a volunteer assistant coach now that swam for me 30 years ago. I get invited to weddings. I get Facebooked by kids I coached 20 or 30 years ago so it must be similar to a teacher - elementary school teachers go through, but to me – I mean – yeah, I really enjoyed being at Olympic Trials last year – don't get me wrong on that – that was a lot of fun, but hearing from former swimmers 10, 20, 30 years down the road – that to me is the most satisfying thing you can have as an age group coach. It is, you know, more than any one swimmer or anything like that.

BRANDON: I have thought about this question a little bit and my answer is a little bit nebulous and maybe a little bit cheesy because I remember coming to these conferences when I was a brand new coach and I would hear coaches say, well – you know – it is really satisfying when you see an athlete get it and the more I can step back and look at that – it is about your athletes getting it and for me the most satisfying thing is when they have truly figured out that the message that you have been trying to teach them about empowerment – that their own destiny is in their hands – that really clicks with them and you can see it in their eyes and you can see the day they show up to workout and they say – “you know what – I am going to get better at butterfly today because I want to and I know that I can” even though they hated butterfly the day before – I think that is the most satisfying thing for me.

DON: I would go a little bit bigger picture and our team motto is “Character first” and I think for my brother and I the most satisfying thing is to see young men and women and kids come in that are either undisciplined or lack self-confidence

and through this process of swimming and training and being an athlete become self-confident kids and young adults of character and ultimately leaders is probably the most satisfying thing.

TOM: I am going to throw one little plug in here. Don – you sent me in some of our communications getting prepared for this – he sent me kind of a team recap or almost like a yearbook and can you explain a little bit about what you put in it. I shared it with some other people in our office and it is one of the most amazing things I have ever seen put together by a swim team on an annual basis and there were parts of it that I didn't even know – I am sorry – I am telling a little bit, but one of the sections in there is the seniors have to write a letter back to the club about what they learned or what was important to them from swimming and I don't know any of these kids and I am like almost tearing up in my office reading this stuff and I am like – WOW – IS THIS POWERFUL – so, it kind of ties in with the retention, but also you know – I think, kind of some of the stuff that you just mentioned. Can you talk a little bit about how you do it, how you put it together and what is included in it?

DON: Well, what – I had just written a letter to the team and to the parents about the character of our high school group because they really are an extraordinary group and I have talked about this before. We travel with 40-50 high school kids. We don't ever have chaperones. It is 2 or 3 coaches max – we don't do bed checks and we don't have problems and it is the way they live and the way they represent the team at practice and I think it is pretty extraordinary and they are just great to be with so I just wrote a letter – it was a 2 ½ page letter to the parents and I just wanted to articulate that so they knew and they knew how proud we were of them. That was the letter that I wrote to the team, but we have a tradition that graduating seniors write a letter back to the team – kind of an exit letter and they just talk about their experience and the letters are pretty impactful and pretty profound and they are nice to read because in every letter that was written – not one kid mentioned anything about a time or a place

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and they were all pretty competitive swimmers so that is – they are actually on the website if anybody has an interest in reading them, but you know – what you are most proud of – that really would be it.

TOM - Question: Okay now – on the converse – what is the one thing that you regret doing or not doing as an age group coach? It is true confession time here.

BRANDON: I think for me – sometimes we have our moments where we act like we are mad at a kid or yell for a fact or things like that – depending on the athlete – I think – I don't lose my temper very often. I can probably count the number of times I have lost my temper on one hand in my life, but I think the things I regret most are probably when I have lost my temper for real in practice and I still think about those times and when you are the person that is supposed to be the adult. Hopefully, you have learned from those, but I think those are what I regret the most.

DON: I would just add one quick thing and maybe this might help you – in our early career we were so intense that we would never take a day off and we wanted to be the leaders in terms of commitment and discipline so we literally never took a day off and we always believed that we had to be there and it wasn't until later on that I realized – you know what? It wasn't that important and I sacrificed relationships with family and friends so I would encourage you – it is not that important and if you preach BIG PICTURE – take time off – spend time with your family – don't be obsessed.

MICHAEL: I have frequently been obsessed so I would probably have to take that one from Don, but secondarily – just the little picture is that every time that you relate with a swimmer – you talk with a swimmer – there are almost an infinite number of ways you can get across what you want to get across and way too much – especially when I was younger – I would let my emotion determine how I said what I said – as opposed to trying to take a step back and figure out – okay – who am I dealing with. How

do I get this person to where I want him to be so in other words – thinking a little more strategically about how you are going to say what you want to to a swimmer and you know – if you take the emotion out of it and look strategically – you make a lot fewer mistakes – a lot fewer crying swimmers when they are already upset, etc.

JOHN: I guess I would have to say that there are probably times in my career that I could have been more diplomatic with parents. To get a real list of what I have done wrong maybe you would have to call my wife. She has a very long list of things I have done since I have been doing this. Again, sometimes you just have to distance yourself from the parents. I am sure you have all been in real frustrating situations with them and I think the longer you do it – the shorter your fuse is. I wish I could count on my – just one hand – how many times I have lost my temper – that would probably be this week – because it is funny. The longer you do it – at least I found – it is kind of funny for new parents – a parent puts a 10 year old on the team and you feel like you are being challenged like he is testing you to see if you are good enough to coach their kid and you have been doing this for your whole life and it just gets old after a while and you try to put the assistant coaches in the way – you try to put your wife in the way – you try to put email in the way and not answer your phone. You get caller ID and things like that, but I would say the biggest issues that I have had in the past probably parent-oriented – not kids – because I feel I have had pretty good relationships with the kids and you know – they get to know me. It is almost like your own children after a while because I spend so much time with them so it is a family thing and everyone yells and everyone forgives and forgets and everyone gets along and we all love each other in the end, but it is the parents that I guess I would regret some of the interaction with.

FROM AUDIENCE - Question: John, do you find that the parent drove you to the point where you were very blunt or did you start off at that point and then kind of back up?

JOHN: Oh no – it is usually a gradual build-up. I have had parents – I mean – now they text message me on deck during workouts asking me why their kids are in such and such a lane. It got to the point one season I closed practices to all the parents. I don't know how many teams have that as a policy and people got really mad. Like two or three parents had spoiled it for everybody. It is definitely a gradual thing. You give everyone a couple mulligans and you say okay – they are new and we will let you slide, but every team I am sure has them. You could probably name three on your team and it's like everyone – even the parents avoid these parents. They do not want to sit with them in the stands. They don't want to work with them in the concession stand. They just never have anything nice to say about anything, but yet they still like the coach enough that they won't go to another team. We had one this season and again – I lost it on deck and the father came up to me and for months he had been telling me what a terrible coach I was and his son just got accepted at Brown University for swimming which is kind of ironic and I said, "if I am so terrible, please find another team before the start of next season because your family is not being asked back. You know, I can't have you coming back and he was just so frustrated because he wanted to criticize me, yet he didn't want to leave so that was the frustrating part for both of us, but I didn't ask him back so he is gone.

FROM AUDIENCE - Question: How many of the panelists have got text messaging and how many are on Facebook?

JOHN: I have both, but I have a policy – I will not – if I get a friend request from someone on the team I ignore it. I accept it from parents. I accept it from former swimmers, but a lot of the kids on the team try to send you a friend request. I just absolutely ignore that because that gets ugly and I learned that from having instant messaging – like through AOL and the kids started texting me and then you would see their away messages and I saw an away message of one of our girls once – she went on a 4

year scholarship to a Division I school saying – swimming is never fun on our team and all this other stuff and it is like – I just didn't want to see it so I wanted to distance myself from the kids because sometimes they say stuff on there that they don't really mean. They like to – it is kind of popular to complain about your coach on how hard the workouts were or whatever, but I think you are better off not knowing some of this stuff and not getting too close to the swimmers. I mean – you have to maintain a professional relationship with them a little bit. I try to get really close to my kids, but at some point you have to draw the line and say – they do not have to have access to me – you know – every minute – every day. Some of the kids do text me though and you know – I try not to overdo it. I will respond, but you know – I am not going to carry on a half hour conversation with a 12 year old because it just gets crazy.

MICHAEL: I am technologically stupid so I do not Facebook – I don't text. I don't instant message. They are not allowed to call me at home. Yeah, I did finally breakdown and get a cell phone, but they are not allowed to call me at home. They can leave a message at work or they can email me so I like to keep my home life to myself and if – I mean Anson Dorrance – UNC women's soccer – was talking about a situation where his secretary said something was urgent and he just threw the message away. I am a soccer coach. How can it be so urgent? Same thing – I am a swimming coach – what can be that much of an emergency? They can talk to me at the pool.

BRANDON: Unfortunately the other parts of my job dictate that I have electronic leashes on at all times, except for right now – I left my Blackberry and cell phone in the room above. I am not on Facebook though. I think I was on Facebook for about 24 hours because I had a friend who wanted to show me some pictures and I started getting more emails than I normally get and that was the end of that, but I will say that the athletes are very respectful of not really bombarding me too much with email unless it is to tell me they are not going to be at a practice or something like that and we have a good system – I have a good filter system for the

most part in terms of the parents know that unless it is – I try to communicate as much as I can, but if they ask me too many questions in one email – like more than 2 questions – they probably are not going to get a response, at least over email. I would probably call them.

DON: We text to the degree that it is efficient – not social – well obviously we have text messaging on our phones. The kids will text about workout if there is a conflict so we are okay with that. If it gets social we just tell them – you know – we like you, but that is going a little bit too far and just a little bit different philosophy – we are very close to the kids in a professional sense, but we care about them as family and we do accept phone calls at home and as I said – the kids are very respectful. They call if there is a problem or need and we want to be there for them. They text if there is a conflict, but that is really the extent of it, we don't have social conversations. There is a lot of college stuff going on as well.

TOM - Question: What do you find most difficult about coaching age group swimmers?

MICHAEL: Parents who read one article on the internet and think they are experts and so from that moment on they question – they do not trust anything that you are trying to tell them and that is despite the fact that all the kids around their swimmer are doing the program and a lot faster and they cannot figure out what is wrong with their kid – it has got to be the coaches' fault.

BRANDON: I think the biggest thing is getting the message across to not only the kids, but the parents, about consistency and if you are really interested in your child's career and if they are at a level where they are going to championship meets – it might not be a good idea to take a vacation like two weeks before so things like that – that is probably the most frustrating thing for us – even though we preach it over and over and sit down and lay out the season for them and say these are really good times to take vacations.

DON: I would just say it again from a bigger picture perspective – it would be embracing discipline and work ethic and I think it is probably

a societal issue as well, but even kids that are willing to come to practice and do what you ask them to do to move to a level where they embrace work ethic. I think that is when careers start to accelerate and I think when they can get over that hump you see significant changes, but that is probably what we try to work them towards as quickly as possible.

TOM - Question: If you could go back and change and do one thing differently with your age group program – what would it be?

DON: Well, I would offer an answer – I do not have any apologies for it, but we – in our early years we talked about a lot of lessons – a lot of aggressive lessons and with the year around team, Orinda Aquatics – mostly due to scheduling and conflicts and coaches are so busy – we never started a swim school and we haven't offered lessons and if there was a way to do it – that would be the one thing that I would change is to incorporate that into the program. We work with kids. Quite often we will spend time with kids after practice. We will do whatever they need to do, but we have gotten away from the in the water aggressive lesson work that we used to do at the Rec. level and the summer leagues so that would probably be the one thing that I would change is if I could start over again would be to incorporate aggressive in water lessons with kids.

BRANDON: I think for me when I was a younger coach and I got somebody good – the tendency to over-coach them or get a little bit too over-zealous with them or put too much stock in that kid and maybe put too much pressure on him. I can't think of any really specific examples, but I am sure that I did that a few times and once you have stepped back, realized that you are going to have a lot of athletes go through and it is about their one career – not all the athletes that you coach so you need to take each one of their careers very seriously. It needs to be about them and not you and if it is about you then maybe you shouldn't be in the role you are in.

MICHAEL: Probably do a better job with parenting education because usually – if there are problems it

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hasn't been because of the swimmers. They have tended to buy in pretty well. It has been more the parents and in our area, we are the only serious club there. Everybody else is recreational and seasonal so when people come to us it is with zero experience with year-around clubs - with clubs that want to be Nationally oriented as opposed to local dual meet - that sort of thing - high school, so it really is a different world from what they are used to - even though they may have come from another swimming program locally and I think that in particular - the first couple of years I was at York I didn't fully appreciate how ignorant they were and I mean that not in an insulting way, but just realistically. I didn't know how much they didn't know and I think as the team has gotten better and as our parents' group has gotten more and better organized and more helpful to me the parents are doing a pretty good job of helping the new parents, but I think that I personally could have and should have done a much better job bringing them up to speed so that I wouldn't get so much backlash with every decision I made that first couple of years in particular.

JOHN: I would have to agree with that. I think if I had to go back and change things I would try to be a little more pro-active in terms of parent education and interaction, because it seems that the best job that I have done at educating parents is usually when it is too late. Sometimes when you get the phone call or you get the email - it is too late at that point and reasonable as your arguments may be, had you done it six months earlier, perhaps you could have avoided the whole situation - just by pre-empting it so I am not a big guy on having team meetings and parent meetings. I try to avoid that, but I think if I had to go back and change anything I would probably have at least - you know - one or two full team meetings a season - just to - even if it is just a social type thing where people can interact and ask questions because a lot of times you will talk to a parent and you know - they will come in all hot and hostile and then they will just go - oh wow - yeah, that makes sense and if you had just gotten to

that parent a little sooner it could have been better so I should have been more pre-emptive I think.

TOM: Michael, you kind of hinted at this, but since you all up here have had some number of years of coaching experience - to the coaches out in the room that this is maybe their first ASCA World Clinic - what one or two pieces of advice would you have for them? Your coaching philosophy in a nut shell.

JOHN: I would say - I mean - I've been doing this again - for 35 years and I mean - it seems - I feel like I am just as energetic and enthusiastic about this as I was when I first got started so if you can convey your love of the sport to your athletes and get them excited about it - I think that is half the battle. I think one of the most satisfying things I have ever had was again - on deck at Trials last year I noticed that four of the coaches on deck at that meet had swum for me - which was kind of rewarding. I have had former swimmers of mine that are college coaches now, Masters Swimmers - they are still in the sport because they love the sport and if you can get them hooked on the sport - that is half the battle because the people that are successful in it are - I mean - it is almost a cult type thing. I mean - most of the people at this clinic love swimming - they cannot get away from it. People that have tried to quit coaching go back to coaching. It is an addiction. It is a love and if you can convey to your athletes your enthusiasm for the sport I think that is the best thing that you can do. That is more than teaching them the hand entry in freestyle or anything else you could possibly teach them technically.

MICHAEL: I think it is - teach them to want to be excellent and to set really, really, high standards in every single thing they do. We have a little 2 page credo which is Latin for "I believe" which is just a list really of attitudes that we are trying to teach the kids every single day and part of our daily brain-washing session is going through one section at a time and just teaching kids the attitudes that lead to success - not just in the pool, but in every single thing that

they are going to do. I think that is absolutely crucial and I would be doing exactly the same thing if I were coaching cross-country skiing - which I almost did instead of swimming or basketball or football or cooking or whatever and it is the importance of excellence.

BRANDON: I would say have a vision for what you want your program to look like and get your team and your parents, your athletes to buy into that vision. One of the things that I have done - even with our age groupers is - I sat them down in a team meeting one day and I said - I want you to tell me what the 3 things our team stands for - from their perspective - so we made a list of 10 things and we said okay - well how do we whittle this down to three so that we can all remember it and what are the three core things that you really want to stand for and that you are going to remember if somebody asks you what your team stands for you can spout them off.

The first one was SPORTSMANSHIP, although they didn't like the word sportsmanship so they changed it to "SPORTS PERSON SHIP" and how you impact that and everything that goes along with that in terms of just being congenial to your competitors to how you carry yourself to how you wear your uniform to your attitude towards practice. The second was being competitive at an International level. Now, that might sound kind of funny coming from age groupers, but the point of it was - is that we wanted to expose them to a larger world of swimming - what was out there - not just their local LSC Championships. There is an Olympic Games - there is a National Team - there is a National Youth Team - there are camps that you can go to. It doesn't mean that those are all important, but it means all the steps along the way to get there are important so we wanted to expose them to that and they wanted to learn about those things. And thirdly was passion for swimming and what that meant was that you show up to practice every day ready to learn. You

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know what your goals are – that you are a 24 hour athlete.

It doesn't mean you blow everything else off, but each one of those kids can spout that off pretty quickly and we would start every team meeting with What Do We Stand For? And they would be dying – jumping out of their chairs so they could be the first person to say what the first thing was so I think again – to recap is to knowing what your team stands for – knowing what the vision is and being able to communicate that and getting everybody to buy in.

DON: I will reiterate some of the things that I have talked about, but I would just say “sell the long-term and sell the life's lessons and we have seen this for 30 years, Embrace the Challenge – Embrace Work Ethic – Learn Humility, Integrity and put the team first. Sell it and demand it every day from every swimmer and you can do that at a young age and that is what will really impact the kids and will transform – not only their swimming, but their lives” so that is what I would say and also those letters are on the website if you want to read them and they really embody these concepts.

TOM - Question: How do you – Don, you kind of mentioned this a little bit earlier – how do you balance your lifestyle with the job?

DON: Well, I may be a little bit different and I may be an anomaly, but I really don't. Because the team is a family to us and, you know, we try to be there for them whenever they need anything. We tell the parents that. We want to support them beyond the pool and they make an extraordinary commitment. They are great kids. They never abuse the relationship and it is very positive. It is a very positive relationship. So it probably is different - it is not the norm. And you know, I wouldn't recommend it for everybody, but for us, it has worked.

BRANDON: I feel really, really lucky that I actually really, really like my job and I have integrated my lifestyle into my job the best that I can. I surround myself with friends that have the same lifestyle and the same passions that I

do. I mean – my recreation is I still go back to my pool and I go swimming on Saturdays and Sundays, or I run with my friends. I think that is the biggest thing. Secondly, I am also very blessed because I work with a staff of very competent coaches that each respect one another. If somebody needs to take some time to take the weekend off and go to a wedding for family or funeral or whatever – everybody respects each other's time very much. We take care of each other that way so everybody gets to balance themselves out, I think.

MICHAEL: I balance with great difficulty. I love swimming. I love trying to figure it out. I think, in particular, with the senior swimmers who are putting so much of their time and effort in the pool, that I owe them my very, very best. And I want to do right by them so that they can get as good as they want to be. That said, I love Beethoven. I love Shakespeare, among others. I love running. I used to love cross-country skiing when I lived in an area where I could do it. So there are things that I do away from swimming, but I love spending most – if not quite all – of my time thinking about swimming.

JOHN: I think this is probably one of the more important issues that young age group coaches are going to have to deal with. Whenever I see somebody young getting into coaching I tell them, “Be real careful when you are going to get married because that is probably the toughest obstacle you face when it comes to a coaching career.” My wife and I were both working fulltime, we are raising four children and we had opposite schedules. So it is really tough to integrate your life as a fulltime coach and raise a family. I was fortunate enough that all four of my children swam, so I wasn't away from them and it actually made the job a lot easier. I had a half hour commute and it was kind of a special time I could have with my kids – going there and coming home - and I could spend a lot of time with my kids because of that.

It was definitely a strain in our family - just in terms of getting everything done when they were little. They

had to go to soccer games, I was at a meet, and my wife had to go to four different travel soccer venues. It was impossible. We were always trying to work out car pools and just get coverage. So I would tell young coaches to be real careful. Make sure, if you are engaged, that your wife or husband knows what they are getting into. Because, you know, when you are dating it is real cool, and when your wife comes to the meets and she sees you are a good coach and the kids are winning. It is different when you are leaving for practice at 5 o'clock and she is going, “Well, who is going to help me give the kids baths? Who is going to feed the kids?” So in terms of lifestyle, I would say this is a very, very stressful occupation for people that are married and, from what I have read and seen, it has a pretty high divorce rate that goes with it too. One of my former swimmers, who is actually giving a talk tomorrow, actually married another coach - which I think is probably the safest thing to do because they understand what you are getting into. But, you know, I will bet there are a lot of coaches out there going through family therapy – just because of the scheduling. So I would say, if you can manage a family and still coach fulltime, you are amazing and I would like to talk to you after the clinic.

TOM - We have about 7 or 8 minutes left. FROM AUDIENCE - Question: How do you integrate dry land into the younger age groups in your program?

BRANDON: We have a separate dry land coach, and we are very fortunate to have that. Again, we take what we do at the top of that program and we work backwards – even if it is just stretching a couple of times a week for the younger kids – all the way up to what we do with the older kids which is an hour and a half of dry land a couple of times a week, plus weights. And again, it is just like everything else we do in our program - we try to figure out what the end result is going to be and work backwards and build upon that.

FROM AUDIENCE - Question: How many times a week do you do dryland?

BRANDON: It just depends on which group they are in. Yeah, it might be stretching once or twice a week, all the way up to dry land three times a week.

MICHAEL: Our little guys do dry land every day for 15 to 30 minutes. Part of that is brain-washing and part of it is physical work. They will usually alternate that second part between stretching – in particular breast stroke stretches so that they can make themselves into good breaststroke kickers - and then a lot of ab work. They do the same kinds of exercises that our older kids do with the same sort of focus on trying to do the exercises correctly, as opposed to just doing them for so long that they break down and look ugly, and I get mad.

JOHN: My team does not do dry land with 12 and unders. When kids get into what we call our senior elite group we try to hook them up with personal trainers to do it at a time when we are not swimming. Our top kids, like I said, are swimming close to 24 hours a week, so it is tough enough to schedule the water time there. So to do it as a group would be almost insane because we have them so long and especially with the commute some of them have. So we try to hook them up with personal trainers that can meet them on mornings when we don't have morning workouts or early afternoon, if they are not doing high

school swimming or whatever. We just to try to fit it into their schedules and get more one on one stuff.

DON: We go two to three days a week – mostly stretching, flexibility, light medicine balls, core body stuff. And the coaches that run those workouts do the dry land. It is around the workout time so they will meet before the workout. It is mostly introductory.

FROM AUDIENCE - Question: How do you personally handle some of the criticism that you get from parents?

DON: I can talk to that, if you don't mind, for a second. We just had our parent meeting, and it is an extensive meeting. We try to explain the philosophy of the program and we ask for their support and respect. One of the pages in the handout is this triangle. We explain that the base of the triangle is the coaching staff and the parents, and that everything points to the kid. And that, in a sense, they are team members on this team and they have a responsibility and an obligation – just like everybody else. Like I do and like their kids do. If there is a problem just please give us the respect to communicate with us and we would be happy to explain. We generally do not have parent problems and maybe it is because we have been there so long. But I think that educating early and having

that philosophy helps a little bit. If you have isolated situations you just have to determine whether it is just a bad seed that needs to move on, or whether there is a misunderstanding.

MICHAEL: I've gotten some of the nastiest emails you can imagine. Just the whole format of email is dangerous because you can push that send button without really thinking. A lot of people say some things they really regret later. My first line of defense is to go for a very long run and cool down and never to answer an email like that right away. I also have talked to the parents about how to deal with me, alright? If you want a good response, do not insult me right off the bat, because presumably, if you are sending me an email like that it is because you want something from me. Well, you are not going to get it if you put me on the defensive right away. So you need to learn how to deal with me. Don't say the same thing 47 times in an email. Just say it once. I can get it. If it is important, call me. Do not email me about it. If it is important, expect that I will call you and I won't email you about it. Because with email, there are way too many ways to misconstrue the tone and to assume that someone is attacking you when they really don't mean to be, or whatever. So I much prefer to be talking face to face – even though I can be gruff or blunt or concise. I let people know that I am available after practice and that I will stick around for as long as they need me to stick around. And then – don't call me at home.

JOHN: You know – one thing that I would say is – again, email made this much harder - the best thing to do is to schedule a meeting with the parent that forces a little period of decompression. If the meeting is in two days both of you will have calmed down by then, so it is just a lot safer. Otherwise, you are going to be in an exchange where you are going five emails each way and no one is going to be getting anything done. Again, I think the most productive resolutions I have had to parent problems have been with personal meetings or phone calls. But meetings are better because, again, it puts in the time delay.

Brandon Drawz

“Communicate any way that you can. And if you can't solve it just through an email or a phone call...we have a pretty good system. We call them pool reps, and they are kind of coach's spies for us.”

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BRANDON: I would say communicate often. Communicate any way that you can. And if you can't solve it just through an email or a phone call...we have a pretty good system. We call them pool reps, and they are kind of coach's spies for us. We keep them out on the deck and we plant them in the stands. They have designated responsibilities which they do for the coaches and they are sort of the ears for the coaches. If there are things boiling, we try to hear about it beforehand. It doesn't always work because they know who the coach's reps are, and sometimes they stay away from them. But you all know - you can look up in the stands and kind of see what is going on a little bit. If, you know, they are talking into their lapel or they are off in a corner - texting - we try to be aware of that.

One thing that we have, and it doesn't get used very often, is a clear outline to a grievance process. If you have a real problem, and if you try to skip any portion of that process, you

are going to get kicked back down. I know it sounds very bureaucratic, but if you have got a problem and you cannot solve it with the coach, then it gets escalated up the food chain and ultimately ends up with the executive board. I don't think in my 5 years there I have ever had a grievance go all the way to the Executive Board. It is a nice backup system though, so that people realize there is a means for them to express themselves.

I think the other thing is - in addition to communication - make people part of the process and give them ownership in those decisions. That is huge. I am going to speak to the merger for a second here, if I can. I do not want to run us over, but one of the things that we did when we merged our club is we formed a transition committee which was a separate entity from our parent board and our executive board. All the decisions - everything that had to do with the merger - came out of

that group and they were their ideas. We had to work through them in that room. I can tell you right now that, at the beginning of that process it was a very tense and hostile environment. It was not a lot of fun to go to those meetings. But by the end of the process - after six or eight months or whatever - it was. After we had laid out the entire process it was a lot more fun. People were joking and laughing and people stopped showing up to the meetings because they just realized that things were probably in pretty good hands. So that is one example that I can use.

TOM: Okay - we are running up against our time frame and I really want to thank you for being very patient and sitting here for three hours worth of age group coaching stuff. Also, I really appreciate and thank the panelists. You guys did an awesome job and thank you very, very much. ●

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The Fitter & Faster Tour is a Swim Champions event by Artluck Promotions



Launch Ahead of the Competition New Track Start PLUS+™ gets swimmers on track.

Get the leverage you need over the competition with Paragon Aquatic's new Track Start PLUS+™ modular starting platform concept. Changes in the competitive swimming rulings from **FINA AND USAS** allowing angled back plates have given us an opportunity to rethink our line of starting platforms. *Complement your new or existing Paragon Aquatics Track Start® platform with an Adjustable Backplate and Side Hand Grips.*



This seamless upgrade allows swimmers to use the tilted plate design and side mounted hand grips for enhanced balance in the ready position, enabling a stronger, more controlled push off and a faster start. Backplates are constructed with a slip-resistant, sand coated finish to match your starting platform. Side mounted hand grips are constructed of stainless steel and finished with rubber non-slip grips.

Paragon Aquatics is always working to discover new ways to increase your competitive edge.

**Retrofits to Existing
Paragon Track Start
Starting Platforms**



When reliability counts . . . count on Paragon Aquatics.

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