

Success in Athletics

Many parents wonder what differentiates the great athlete from the average one, and whether their kids have what it takes to be great athletes. We'll let Dr. Jack Daniels, an exercise physiologist at State University of New York at Cortland, and an influential figure in developing the U.S. Swimming Sports Medicine Program, enlighten us.

"There are really only four ingredients for success in athletics. One is genetic ability. Some genetic differences are easy to see (7-foot-plus Kareem Abdul Jabbar's basketball endowments), while others are physiological and internal differences that can't be seen. In America we have a hard time accepting those differences and we think that everyone who trains hard enough can be a champion.

The second thing besides genetic ability is intrinsic motivation. If you have a seven-footer and the coach wants him to play basketball, but he wants to be an artist, you won't get too much basketball out of him.

The third ingredient is opportunity - providing our athletes with good facilities, good weather, and competition against good athletes.

The final ingredient is direction. Direction means a good coach and a good program to follow.

Direction is the area where parents and coaches really have an opportunity to help the athlete. With the fragmented nature of our national swimming community, we have to put aside our personal concerns and desires and focus our efforts on helping our athletes attain their potential. Here is the part age group coaches can play:

- * Teaching outstanding biomechanics to build the base for all future swimming successes and fulfillment. Stroke education in learn-to-swim, novice, and advanced age group programs must be primary.
- * Teaching values that reflect the best of our sport. Swimmers must be educated in their own careers, positive image building of themselves as athletes and people, and on their part in the national swimming effort. Values and attitudes again shape the future for our sport.
- * Provide the aerobic training base from which science tells us great athletes develop.
- * Educate parents, our athletes' primary support system, to the needs of their athletes. Swimming careers are lifelong pursuits, and parents of young athletes need a vision of the rewards attainable by their youngster.

The high school coach can also contribute by recognizing the needs of both the elite and developing athlete in their programs, and by instilling in their athletes the knowledge that

good swimming demands near year-round participation in YMCA, USS, or community programs. The high school coach also needs to cooperate with the club coach to ensure a coherent individual training and competition schedule for each athlete."