

News For

SWIM PARENTS

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Three Variables of a Swimmer's Performance That Parents Contribute To

By Jack Maddan, Head Coach and CEO of Hilton Head Aquatics.

As we approach the midpoint of the short course season the athletes are realizing that they are on the path to reaching their goals or they need to make some wholesale changes. Each season presents another mountain to climb for each swimmer. The climb they have to make will depend on the level of success they achieved in the previous season. Success is a relative term and is different for each athlete and training group in the program. For one swimmer it might be to qualify for the State meet and for another it might be to make Olympic trials. Whatever the goal might be, each swimmer has to be willing to do more work than they did in the previous season. And parents can help.

Parents put a lot of time, money and commitment into the sport. You assist in providing the best opportunity for your children to be successful in the pool. Coaches appreciate that. There are certain variables that you have a direct impact on that do affect the swimmers' level of success.

One variable is practice attendance. As a parent, we are asking you to support the coaching staff and encourage your swimmers to be at the number of practices required by the coach. If the swimmers are not making that requirement it is hard for them to benefit from the whole seasonal plan. This is critical because each coach has a daily, weekly and seasonal plan and missing out on that will hinder the overall success. This is different with each group, but as each swimmer moves within the program, the expectations become much greater.

Another set of variables are nutrition, rest and body changes. This is, for some people, the most sensitive area, but it is significant and should be addressed seriously. As parents, if you are not providing your children with good fuel on a daily basis then over time they will not excel in practice. This starts the moment they enter the program. If you start with good nutritional habits it makes it easier for them to sustain over the course of the season and to establish a healthy lifestyle in the long term.

It is also imperative that each swimmer is getting adequate rest. When a swimmer is burning the candle at both ends this is where injuries and illness set in. When we have a day off, all swimmers should be wise about the decisions made so their bodies can recover properly.

The physiological factors that take place in athletes can impede or accelerate their progress. When a swimmer is growing, depending on how much they are growing, this can be a good or bad thing. Many swimmers struggle physically and mentally during this time. The growth can make them stronger in the water or can cause them to be awkward because of growing too quickly. This is usually more typical in boys between the ages of 13-16. For the girls, going through puberty affects body composition and proportions and can really mess up stroke techniques especially in butterfly and breaststroke, especially on the girl's side. In addition, girls go from an 11-14 year old with a lean body that recovers very quickly to a young woman's body that takes longer to recover between workouts. This is where plateaus sometimes take place and can last up to several years. Parental support in a positive manner is a key component in helping them to wade through these waters. There are two specific things a parent can do. First, never allow a young swimmer to be identified as a stroke specialist – Be cautious in saying things like, "You're my perfect little butterflyer," or "You'll be swimming the breaststroke in the 2020 Olympics." Secondly, focus comments on continual, long term improvement in all strokes.

One more variable: parental support of the swimmer and coach. This should be the easiest one to control, but it is not always the case. Parents have only one role at a swim meet: support the swimmer and the coach to achieve the athlete's goals. I think this is important to remember because sometimes the athlete and parent have different goals.

These are the comments a coach would most appreciate a parent to say to their child before and after a swim: Before the swim - "Good luck and have fun." After the swim -- "Good Job," and "What did your coach say?" and "I'm proud of you," or sometimes, "I am sure you will do better next time."

If your dialogue is different than this, then you are not supporting the coach and swimmer relationship. The most detrimental thing you can do for your child is compare them to another swimmer, coach them before or after a swim, or give them negative feedback after a race.

So what I recommend is to make sure that you are communicating with your son or daughter on how they are doing in practice on a daily basis. Periodically check in with their coach and ask him or her how your child is doing, so there are no surprises when it comes to competition time.

Remember, swimming is a sport where we look at long term progress. Some athletes have to work for 6 months to drop one second in an event. If you can really be aware what the contributing variables are for success (and remember that means having some patience to reach the process), then I stand behind the belief that your children will be better prepared for anything that comes their way in life.