

News For SWIM PARENTS

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Which Events Should Your Child Swim?

Issue: My 12 year old will be aging up before the end of the season and she needs every opportunity to make AAA times in her best events before then. The coach, however, seems to have different ideas about the meets we attend and the events she swims. I do not like the way the coach selects my child's meet and event schedule.

Response: Rule number one for any concern regarding decisions made by the coach is to communicate directly with the coach at your earliest opportunity. The coach may mention one or more of the following considerations:

1. Age group swimmers should have an opportunity to experience all the official events for their age group. In fact, many coaches would make a case for having intermediate to advanced age group swimmers also swim 200's of back, breast, and fly, as well as the 400 IM and distance freestyles. BUT, there needs to be a balance found between the time and expense of driving to too many meets versus the larger objectives of a good age group program. See numbers 2, 3, and 4 below.

2. Achievement should be viewed as career long and not dependent on a mid-season peak in coordination with a last meet effort before aging up. A major push at end of an age group often leads to a letdown than can occur when the child ages up. This discourages the steady and consistent progress that most coaches encourage in age group swimming. Coaches plan careers around seasonal planning, not around birthdays. The primary focus should be on preparing swimmers for the senior team and a secondary focus would be on end of season meets.

3. A combined and unified team effort for end of the season meets is more important than allowing individual swimmers to "peak" for mid-season meets in order to achieve time standards or rankings.

4. The coach is the technical expert of the team and the one with the best perspective for event selection. Event selection often times deliberately includes the swimmer's weakest events as a challenge, as an evaluation tool, as a change of focus, and/or as preparation for future events. Frankly, parents and age group swimmers will not often choose events that offer difficult challenges, change the points of focus, or prepare the swimmer in a tactical way for future events. This is a technical matter and best left to the technical expert – the coach.

Here are a few examples: Distance oriented swimmers may be asked to swim sprint events in order to work on their speed. (If the swimmer's best time in the 100 meter free is 1:13 and they are trying to break 5 minutes in the 400 meter swim then they need the ability to go in 1:13 to 1:14 in the 400 and swimming the 100 gives them a chance to work on their "going out speed.")

A swimmer who has been a good butterfly for the last couple of years and has begun to be identified as a "flyer" by herself and friends and possibly parents, but then finds herself having difficulty improving in the fly events – perhaps due to changes in her body as she matures -- can find new motivation in the other events if given a chance to focus on something different.

One of the great core values of swimming is learning to meet difficult challenges with determination for success. A good coach may deliberately schedule every 11 and 12 year old for the 200 meter butterfly in an upcoming meet and then prepare them for it physically and mentally in practice so that they may face the challenge with some courage. It's a great confidence builder.

...And building confidence comes not only from doing what one is good at, but from doing the uncomfortable and difficult.