

Handling “Move Up” Within the Team

The following is a page from Scott Colby’s “FAST Facts”, their team handbook. It is reprinted here as an excellent example of how to explain one of the prime challenges a club coach faces in moving swimmers from one group on their team, to another group.

GROUP CHANGES CONSIDERATIONS

One of the most emotional aspects of competitive swimming is when a child’s friend is moved to the next level training group and the child is not. It can be a tough call for the coach to make, but the individual needs of the swimmer is the key consideration. Is the move from one group to another in the best long term interest of the swimmer? Some of the following considerations are carefully taken into account when a decision is made to move or not to move a swimmer to the next highest level in our program. Usually, the coaches of the groups in question discuss the situation with the Head Coach to be sure all areas of consideration are taken into account.

ABILITY TO TRAIN-Consistent ability to hold repeat times and intervals in all aspects (swimming, kicking, pulling, etc.) is the primary consideration for a group change. The swimmer must demonstrate they will be able to handle the training load of the next practice group before they are moved. This is important for the self-image and success of the child. Even when placing swimmers on the team at a “tryout,” our motto is when in doubt, put them in the lower group. If you make a mistake, they can always move up and feel successful. If you put them in over their head, they are likely to be demoralized and quit.

ATTENDANCE-Also of prime importance is the swimmer’s ability and/or desire to handle the amount of dedication needed to be in the next group level. The swimmer must make the attendance requirement for the next level for a pre-determined period of time BEFORE they are allowed to move up.

ATTITUDE-Also a prime factor is the swimmer’s attitude. Can they handle increased stress with a positive attitude. Can they handle adversity or “bad luck” or are they devastated by minor setbacks. Does the swimmer enjoy practice? If not, is giving them more of it appropriate?

SOCIAL AGE-Can the swimmer relate to their future peers in the next group? Will they be socially accepted? Is the swimmer “socially” ready to move to a higher level? This is an important factor, yet usually not the overriding factor in determining a group move. Occasionally, a youngster will be too old for the group they are in. In this case, they should be placed in a more advanced group to avoid discouragement and embarrassment. (i.e. a novice 16 year old at 10 year old ability level)

TECHNIQUES-Has the swimmer mastered the start, turn, and stroke techniques you teach at their current level. Do they follow prescribed breathing patterns, etc.? Will they be able to “pick up the ball” with the new group or become lost?

COMPETITION LEVEL- Contrary to popular belief, this is the *least* important category to consider. It can happen that a swimmer in a low group can handily beat a swimmer in a higher-level group in meets! Remember the groups are designed for training, not meets.