

Entering Events for Swim Meets

By John Leonard

One of the interesting questions that parents and coaches face, is that of WHO does the entries for athletes for swim meets?

In most cases, the coaches select the events for the athletes. In a few cases, coaches have abdicated that role and let parents or athletes decide what events to swim. I am here to encourage you to leave that task to the coaches.

The Swim Coach is a resource for parents and athletes in an area in which they are not, themselves, experts. If you had a toothache, you would likely not tie your tooth via string to a doorknob and slam the door. That might end the "tooth problem" but it would not end the toothache and it would likely create strong systemic issues bigger and worse than the original moderate pain of the toothache.

So too, with parents or athletes choosing events for swim meets. While everyone "intends well," the long-term problems created far outweigh the short term convenience of "doing it yourself."

As a resource, coaches should be "managing the swim career" of a child for the optimum long term success of that athlete. If the coach is not viewing their role as managing the swim career, you need a new coach. If the parent wants to manage the swim career of the child, see reference above to doors and teeth. Unless you are a professional swim coach, you can't possibly be expected to understand the implications of choices inherent in entering swim meets. It's just outside the parental role in sports.

Events swum and practices done, have intricate and complicated relationships between the two concepts.

Certainly events to be swum need specific preparation for each event. Certainly preparation in practice and the results thereof, have a great deal to do with what events to chose. One of the commonly expressed philosophies that have long-term "legs" in our sport, is that the athlete is best served by a wide range of competitive and training opportunities, for as long or deep into their career as possible.

Now most coaches will, consciously or subconsciously, "swim away from success" when they enter meets. Most parents or swimmers, will intuitively chose to repeat success when entering meets. Here is why that's a problem.

Suzi is 11 and just came back from a meet where she swam a fine 1:01 in the 100 free. Prior to that, her best time was a 1:04. Great drop!

Now it's time to enter the next meet, which is in two weeks and her mom is looking at the entry. Guess which event she will DEFINITELY chose to enter Suzi in? Yes, the 100 free. (Because "she did so well last time.") So she does.

Fast forward two weeks to the meet. Now, Suzi swims a 1:01.5. Suzi is disappointed. Her mom is disappointed. Her coach is rolling her eyes. Actually, that's a really fine swim, realizing that Suzi swam a 1:04 just a few weeks ago. But in this context, it was not satisfying. Why? Because Suzi was entered in an event that she now had not enough time to either improve because of technique improvements, improve because of training improvements, or even to Grow!

Athletes must do one of those three things to get faster: technical improvements, training improvements or Grow! In this case, not enough time had elapsed to do any of those. Even had Suzi dropped another half second to 1:00.5, it would have been an unsatisfying improvement compared to the previous sensational 3 second drop. No way for Suzi to win in this scenario.

A COACH meanwhile, would not enter Suzi in the 100 free and would enter her in anything BUT the 100 free, coming back to the 100 free in perhaps 6-8 weeks, once enough time had passed for 1, 2 or 3 to occur...and would have entered her in the 400 IM, or the 200 back, or...anything AWAY from immediate past success.

This entry strategy would have kept Suzi excited with new meet challenges, new best times, and new opportunities to expand and broaden her competitive experiences.

Yet it's only natural for athlete or parent to want to repeat the good experience.

The Coach makes the selection that is best for and not "most comfortable for" the athlete.

You should "hire" (read, "chose to swim with") a coach for their swimming expertise. This is one of the most appropriate times to defer to that expertise. And coaches, don't abdicate this most important task to a parent or athlete.

Most of the time, what we "want to do" is not what is best for us to do.