

Think Tank Tuesday: May 2018 Edition



Happy May, NAC Family! We are back for another edition of our Think Tank articles. Last month, we captured the WHY behind our training cycles, long course, and swim meets. This month we are going to venture more towards our practice and training structure and our environment at NAC. One of the most common questions we hear, especially from newer swimmers is, “Will I be swimming/practicing with my friend?” Who doesn’t want to swim in a lane with their very best friend during their adolescent years? Two swimmers may be the same age chronologically, but in completely different places biologically. They may also be in a different place regarding their skill acquisition. At NAC, we recognize that swimming begins as a skill-based sport - where skills take different amounts of time to acquire and hone for each individual athlete - and transitions to a training-based sport. In most youth sports, athletes are grouped together almost exclusively by their chronological age or time standards, rather than their biological age, skill, and maturity level like we do here at NAC.

NAC’s mission is to help all our swimmers to go as far in the sport of swimming as their talent and desire will allow. The coaching staff is always considering the long-term development of each athlete. Development can look completely different from athlete to athlete across each level of our program – rarely are two paths the same. Over the last 40+ years at NAC, our coaches have determined what is developmentally appropriate and expected within each training group (Green, White, Red, Blue, Senior groups, SwimFit, Race, PreComp) of the program. From there, the coaches assess each athletes’ mental and physical maturity, swimming skill set, and what is best for their personal long-term development within the sport. After careful consideration, a swimmer is placed in a certain training group that coaches trust and believe will best set them up for long-term success.

Why do we do this? Every child develops, grows, and learns at various rates. We do not want to put a cap on the development of any athlete. Grouping athletes based on their skill set and maturation allows coaches to create an environment for all athletes to thrive rather than having huge skill discrepancies within the group or huge distractions due to lack of maturity. We want each one of our training groups to be optimized for the development of the athletes within.

Athletes that fall on the younger side of an older or more intense training group may have slightly different expectations and vice versa. For example, in the summer months the top Senior group athletes have a required 10 practices a week. However, the physical age in the Senior group usually spans from 13-19 years old. The Senior group coaches are not requiring a 13-year-old to train 10 practices a week since it’s not developmentally appropriate for that athlete. All our coaches have the knowledge and experience to appropriately set realistic expectations for every athlete. Our partners at BridgeAthletic also adhere to this long-term development philosophy and provide our coaches with an age and skill appropriate dryland training program for each level of the program. It’s important to remember as your athlete moves through the program that NAC considers many factors when moving athletes to new groups – while our process is more time-consuming for our coaches, we know it is the RIGHT way!



Written by: Jessica Ralston & Neal Rushing