

Sending the Coach to Nationals: Thoughts for *Everyone*

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When you read the title above you may think “this article has nothing to do with me and my child.” But it has everything to do with you and your child, especially children in the developmental groups.

Here is what we are talking about: The club should have an expense line as part of its regular budget for sending the coach to nationals, even if it is one swimmer who qualifies. We are saying that the CLUB pays for the coach to go to nationals and that means that part of the dues and fundraising done by parents of developmental (novice) and age group, and slower senior swimmers support the coach going to nationals – especially if it is just one swimmer who has qualified.

A club’s philosophy is represented by its budget line items. “National Travel” for the coach is one of the most important philosophies a club can adapt.

You may not think that is fair. It is difficult for newer swim parents, especially parents of young age group swimmers, to understand the importance of sending the coach away to nationals at great expense while all the other swimmers on the team stay at home without their head coach.

In some clubs, the parents of the swimmer(s) attending nationals are asked to pay the costs of the coach’s travel expenses. This is completely wrong because it loudly says the club does not support national level achievement. In addition, it ignores the fact that the parents of a child who has qualified for nationals has been with the program a very long time and has paid a substantial amount of dues and volunteered a large number of hours in events and fund raisers.

Why should you support the coach’s travel costs for a national level meet even though the possibility of your child getting there someday may seem so far off, and possibly not even imagined at the present time?

Developing a swimmer at national level means that the peak of the program pyramid is healthy. In a healthy program pyramid we have the largest number of swimmers at the base – usually stroke school or learn to swim children. At the next level are the younger age group swimmers who are beginning to compete at meets. Further up are the advanced age group swimmers, then seniors, then a national development group at the peak. Even small programs should be aiming at the peak – even if there is one swimmer in one lane working toward that level. Without a quest for the highest level of swimming, without a peak, there is a loss of incentive by swimmers, parents, and coaches.

It is an important milestone in the development of the swimmer, of the coach, and of the team when the first national qualifier is developed. This swimmer represents the current "peak" of the program. All parts of a program are important but the peak is of special importance because it is a point that all younger developing athletes can look forward to and work towards. It provides direction in the program.

Important note: The club teams that send swimmers to nationals tend to have developmental programs of the highest quality for young children. A nationally oriented club program means better coaching for your young swimmer.

Suppose the swimmer attends nationals without the coach because no one will support the travel expenses.

This is not fair to the athlete or to the coach. The athlete has worked for and deserves the attention and professional guidance of the coach. The coach also deserves the reward of developing such a fine athlete by being involved in the national experience. Attending nationals is also a very important educational experience for the coach. By not sending the coach to nationals with the swimmer the club is also sending a message to the athletes that the club is not interested in elite athletes.

What if the swimmer and coach stay home. This cuts the peak of the program and removes incentives for athletes and coach to become the best they can be. This is the mark of a team that does not include growth as part of its long range goals, or perhaps does not have any goals at all. It is a program that will always have young and relatively inexperienced coaches because few coaches will be satisfied working in a situation where they cannot grow.

When the swimmer and coach attend nationals with the financial support and good will of the entire club this is the mark of a program that looks to the future, believes in growth, and believes in rewarding the good work by both the athlete and the coach. When the coach and athlete attend nationals it is a celebration of team success. The athlete can return home as the hero and "tell the story" of nationals that will inspire the rest of the team.

When the coach goes to nationals it is not just for one swimmer, it is for the whole team... and, it's for your age group swimmer.