



TEAM SANTA MONICA SWIM CLUB OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE TRAINING

Overview

Dave Kelsheimer, CEO and Head Coach of Team Santa Monica (TSM) has a vision and plan for making TSM the premier elite level swim club in Southern California. His vision includes an interdisciplinary support staff including a dietician, a physical therapist, and a clinical sport psychologist who is available to consult with coaches, athletes, and parents to achieve the goal of having every swimmer at TSM fulfill his or her full potential as an athlete. This document describes the sport psychology component of this integrated approach to offering a comprehensive Optimal Performance Training (OPT) program.

In addition to the OPT program, which is provided to the entire TSM family in a consultation model by the sport psychologist, individual clinical sport psychology sessions may be arranged on an as needed basis. Whereas the OPT program is considered part of the TSM package included in quarterly dues, individual clinical sports psychology sessions are separate and must be arranged with the sports psychologist. This ensures that there is a degree of separation between team activities and individual therapy. This is essential to protect the confidentiality of individuals choosing to participate in individual work with the sport psychologist.

Optimal Performance Training (OPT)

Achieving one's full potential requires cognitive, emotional, and physical excellence. In any endeavor requiring cooperation with another person, interpersonal skills and team dynamics become critical. Aspiring to excellence in a competitive environment adds another variable. No one provider can be an expert in all of these areas, but an interdisciplinary team that believes in a holistic approach can provide a range of services to help any individual or group achieve its full potential. Optimal Performance Training (OPT) focuses on integrating cognitive and emotional excellence with the physical training provided by the coaching staff to create an environment where every athlete can perform to his or her maximum potential, not only in the competitive swimming environment, but also academically, vocationally, and socially. Using empirically validated techniques based on cognitive-behavioral theory, OPT teaches athletes, coaches, and parents a model for integrating thoughts, feelings, and behavior to optimize performance in the most competitive and challenging environments. Implicit in this approach is an understanding that all interventions must be developmentally appropriate to the age group being targeted.

Initial Phase: Introducing the Program

Coach education: In order for a sport psychologist to be effective, the coaching staff must buy-in. Most coaches are naturally "applied sport psychologists," meaning that they attempt to apply sport psychology principles to their coaching strategies every day. The first step in adopting OPT is to teach the coaching staff the OPT model and to develop a shared language to be used consistently with athletes every day.

Athlete Education: Athlete education is an ongoing and daily occurrence. Athletes are bombarded by new and often times conflicting information every day; depending on their stage of development their challenge is to accommodate and assimilate this array of information in order to perform at their best.

Parent Education: Particularly at the younger ages, parents play critical role in supporting and reinforcing the efforts of the TSM coaching staff. For this reason it is important that the parents understand the opt model and their role in providing a consistent message to their athletes.

Support Team Education: In order for the full benefit of the multidisciplinary team to be achieved we must all be on the same page as well. As with the coaches, finding a common language and agreeing on a protocol for working with athletes on an individual basis and in a holistic manner, is critical.

Second Phase: Integrating the Program

Consultation with Coaches: Coaches must have access to the sport psychologist on a regular and as needed basis in order to consult about individual and team dynamics. Likewise, the sport psychologist must have an opportunity to observe the coaches in action in order to provide feedback on a regular and as needed basis.

Interactions with Athletes: Obviously, the focus of every member of the coaching and support staff should be on the athletes. The more visible the sport psychologist can be the more likely he is to be able to intervene effectively.

Availability to Parents: The sport psychologist should be available to parents on an as-needed basis. After the initial orientation to his services, parents may contact the sport psychologist with questions or concerns that he might address but this will be initiated by the parents. On occasion, members of the coaching staff may request that the sport psychologist reach out to the parent or be involved in communication with the parents about their athlete. In addition, the sport psychologist will be available to do individual work with athletes but these arrangements must be made separately from the team consultation model.

Support team integration: It is critical that the support team work together to ensure that a consistent message is being delivered and that the full value of an integrated approach is being realized. This needs to occur at both the individual athlete level and at the team level.

Third Phase: Day to Day Functioning

Contracted for twenty hours a month, a typical breakdown of those hours looks like this:

Weekly attendance at practice (4 hours per week, 16 hours per month): Developmentally appropriate Optimal Skills Training, broken down by age group or level of ability, as determined by the coaching staff (two groups). Available to observe and consult with coaches, athletes, and parents as needed.

Monthly meeting with coaches and support staff (2 hours per month away from pool deck): Discuss individual and team dynamics in order to maximize athletic performance.

Monthly training session for coaches or parents as determined by coaching staff (2 hours per month): Coach or parent education session focused on sport psychology.

Attendance at selected competitions (TBD): Sport psychologist travels to selected major competitions and is available on-site for consultation with coaches.

On-going consultation via telephone and email: Available to coaching and support.

Summary

TSM aspires to be the premier elite level swim club in Southern California. The CEO of TSM understands the importance of an interdisciplinary support staff that will provide a holistic approach to maximizing athletic performance. The sport psychologist is one component of this integrated support staff. The sport psychologist spends about one third of his time with the coaches, one third of his time with the athletes individually and in small groups, one third of his time with the team as a whole, and one third of his time with the parents. If the numbers don't seem to add up you understand the complexities of his position. By far the most enjoyable, and hopefully most productive, time for the sport psychologist is the time spent with the swimmers. Meeting with them in small groups before they get in the water to introduce a mental skill, observing and interacting with them during training, and debriefing after their training, has created a much more psychologically minded group of swimmers, coaches, and parents. Although it is difficult to objectively evaluate the effectiveness of the program, the subjective feedback of all of the stakeholders is uniformly positive. Coaches, athletes, and parents are speaking the same language and as a result all three stakeholders are more psychologically minded.