

Being A Great Swim Parent

As we approach another round of Championship meets, the excitement along with concerns for bringing about best possible performances takes up most of my thoughts. The Senior group and I discuss these things at least three times a year most seriously (and the rest of the year I am just a nagging reminder service).

Most are becoming rather well versed in meet prep, and all have opinions on how their support crew (family, friends, etc) can better help them pursue their dreams during Champs season.

A few easy tips (most easier to say than do, I speak from experience as a sometimes good, sometimes not so good swim mom)...

1. Avoid the swim talk, especially at the dinner table. When they bring it up, you have a green light. If not consider red light time. Wait. They will bring it up eventually. Promise. And it is a much more enjoyable chat for everyone.

2. Avoid comparing them to other swimmers, especially their friends. I cannot think of a single swimmer that is not already extremely good at this, they need no help. As their coach, I try with everything in me to remind them that every single swimmer is on their own swim path involving many variables - growth rates and timing, overall health/injury, other pursuits/hobbies, school/work loads, and family situations. There simply is no apple to apple comparison. Your apple is one of a kind.

3. Speaking of apples to apples - comparing best times or expecting them every time they hit the water is super dangerous. It's an Olympic year so we are all hyper aware of our world class swimmers. Many of our Olympians have held or hold American, NCAA, and/or World Records. Most of those records stand for years even while the swimmers are still competing at top levels. That means they are not swimming best times very often. The same is true at every level - and the faster they get the harder it becomes. The only apples to apples time comparison can be one year prior while considering rest/taper or in season tired, practice suit or tech suit, shaved or not, etc.

*Note 1: And sometimes as they grow their "best" events change. The goal of any swimmer is to become good at as many events as possible. Being a one trick pony gets boring and the pressure is stifling. Tough to enjoy. Once they are full grown plus a couple years it will be very evident what they are best at... their glory before that time are simply hints at what may come.

*Note 2: LCM to SCY conversions are totally unreliable. Simply most kids are better at one or the other to begin and all can become good at both. But in no way is 100 yard free the same as 100 meter free - the race feels entirely different. Gonna need you to just trust me here (or come to two practices and swim with us, your kid will love that).

3. Meet Bags - Stuff and Food. I cannot encourage this enough! Get your kids packing their own stuff, including food. Into one bag they can manage at meets. There is no reason for any parent to lug in anything for them. This is a gift to both of you. Once kids feel confident in prep and walking into a meet prepared with good snacks, spare goggles, etc, their confidence soars and it shows in their performance. And parents, yall get to focus on your own meet needs - or just go to Starbucks and not feel pressured. PS - The big kids know this - never in my whole swim mom life, including when my kids swam their first summer league, did I pack a bag, cooler, or anything - I may have carried a blanket for some of those outdoor setups but that was a selfish thing in all honesty - I don't like sitting in grass. This isn't really a baby step thing, it's more a rip off the bandaid approach - ask questions, drive them to grocery store, help them make a packing list, and move on (probably peek in it before they leave the first few times and make your own go bag). By meet two, just hand them the list. *NOTE: you will without a doubt get an actual call from a frantic kid at some point - this works in your favor, they do NEED you and will be grateful for your presence!

4. Shaving - yes, all the kids, boys and girls, need to begin this as something they do for big meets. Click for article (it matters how they shave) and some other useful info https://www.teamunify.com/SubTabGeneric.jsp?team=txso&_stacid_=196206

5. Avoid talking to them or texting them at meets (or just say "nice swim" without any expectation of response). This was my own most recent lesson as a "college swim mom" and super tough - I am her mom, but also her coach for way too long, and I could not talk to her, and after not having seen her in months, too. Ugh, tough stuff. But one session in I totally understood and by the end I was anticipating how to gently bring this into our team for younger athletes without upsetting kids or parents. It does help. In a real crisis they will call you - on repeat - and super parent you can step in and save the day (your go bag is nice here, too). This diffuses their need to please us (a pressure) and boosts their confidence at the same time because they know (or think) mom and dad aren't worried about me, I got this. *NOTE: Do not let them see how you are nervous for them. EVER. Fake it, do what you gotta do, hold it together - this helps ALOT! Someday they will understand how hard doing parenting is, but that's like 10-20 years away.

6. Champs Meets - these are trickier, more on the line. As the kids mature physically (and mentally) the results of rest/tapering tend to be more pronounced. They can become surprisingly sore like they just hiked a mountain - it's ok, its full restoration of muscles after months of breakdown. They can be even more moody, really moody. In the high school group this is not permission to behave badly at home, it is their responsibility to recognize and manage accordingly. They may sleep more (naps are totally encouraged)! They may be more hungry - be careful here, their workload is down but recovery is important, too. Rule of thumb: If a craving for something good, go for it, if unhealthy or overeating, stop. Supplements - keep it simple if they do not already do this, do not start before big meets. Nutrition - same, keep it simple and normal - a sudden change can bring about bad results. Real food, reasonable portions. Lots of water! If they are thirsty, they are already dehydrated. Music - to calm and/or get excited. Movies - need to laugh or inspire. Rest, rest, rest. For the week or so prior to big meets, doing less is better - no big events, sporting endeavors, walking 5 miles, jogging, going to amusement parks or the mall, getting sunburned, etc - if it's something that makes you tired the next day or want to take a nap, do not do it. And then those sacrifices can be celebrated after the meet - eat the ice cream, go to the lake, etc. Prelims/Finals - rest, eat only. Equal amount carbs and protein, clean real food. Dark quiet room 45 minutes max even if do not fall asleep.

FOOD - Snacks and Meals

Most of all do not change diet completely the day before a meet. Work into it for several days prior if not normally eating clean and for performance. Water, water, water. Electrolyte replacement (anything other than Gatorade, with real sugar or flavored with fruit). Breakfast matters - even if not big, eat something. Snack all day at meet.

Ideas for Breakfast: eggs, acai/mix bowls, fruit, yogurt, bagel, toast, oatmeal, smoothie, rice with honey

Ideas for Snacks: bananas, fruit, veggies, pretzels, goldfish, rice cakes, rice, bagel, granola mix, nuts, jerky

Lunch if Finals: something healthy - equal parts carbs and protein. Our go to is Chipotle chicken, rice, veggies - no tortilla and dairy