

DID YOU KNOW...?

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Early versus Late Maturation

Swimming is a life-long sport. Young athletes need to be aware of some of the factors involved in why they are experiencing much success (early maturers) or limited success (late maturers). An awareness of the situation will aid in keeping both success and failure in perspective while maintaining an eye towards individual skill development. From studying children, growth and development experts have determined that children develop in sequential and predictable ways. Yet, while individuals develop in similar ways, the timing of this maturation process can vary greatly. With two swimmers who are chronologically 11 years old, biologically one may be 10 and the other 15.

Early maturers, who hit their growth spurt prior to their same-aged (chronological) peers, tend to have an advantage in sports, especially sports requiring endurance, speed, and power where body mass is helpful. In high school we quite often see problems as the early maturer, who is used to experiencing success, gets frustrated because now peers are closing the competitive gap. In reality, it's the physical changes that are occurring in their peers that are allowing others to catch up with the early maturer. It is important that coaches and parents help early maturers keep success in perspective as well as continue to encourage the late maturers.

One of the renowned experts on long term training and growth and development, Istvan Balyi, had this to say in an article about athlete training in childhood and adolescence:

“Scientific research has concluded that it takes eight-to-twelve years of training for a talented player/athlete to reach elite levels... Unfortunately, parents and coaches in many sports still approach training with an attitude best characterized as “peaking by Friday,” where a short-term approach is taken to training and performance with an over-emphasis on immediate results. We now know that a long-term commitment to practice and training is required to produce elite players/athletes in all sports.”

“A specific and well-planned practice, training, competition and recovery regime will ensure optimum development throughout an athlete’s career. Ultimately, sustained success comes from training and performing well over the long-term rather than winning in the short term. There is no short-cut to success in athletic preparation. Overemphasizing competition in the early phases of training will always cause shortcomings in athletic abilities later in an athlete’s career.”

Colorado Swimming is dedicated to serving all its athletes and supports a coaching philosophy of the right training at the right time for its age group swimmers. The Education Committee hopes you found this information helpful in supporting your athlete, whether he/she is an early or late maturer.