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## “But It’s Only a Relay”

Guy Edson, ASCA Staff

This is an article about false assumptions. The coach assumes all relay eligible swimmers will be available for the LSC championship meet. The parent assumes that because their child didn’t make any individual cuts their season is over the week before the LSC champs and plans a family vacation. Opps.

This is an article about planning. Coaches plan the season with the end in mind and a common goal is to place as high as possible in the LSC championship meet. Workouts and progressions are designed to prepare age group swimmers for this important meet and relays are a very important part of scoring since they are worth twice the points as individual events. In addition to the scoring aspect, team building and the experienced gained by relay only swimmers are important as well. We like to see parents plan for the end of season meets accordingly as well.

This is also an article on communication. Coaches communicate the importance of the end of season meets from the very beginning of the season and parents would be wise in checking with the coach throughout the season as to the possibility of their child swimming at the LSC championship meet, whether in individual events or relays only.

Relays give relay-only swimmers an opportunity to prepare for the end of season meet along side of their friends. Relays give them a greater sense of belonging to the team and contributing to team goals. Relays give the relay-only swimmer a chance for a “best time” at the end of the season and a chance for a medal or ribbon they might not otherwise have an opportunity for. Relays inspire swimmers to come back the next season as an individual events swimmer. And, relays are simply fun.

All the extra arrangements for the relay only swimmer; all the waiting around; and all the extra expense... is it worth it?

You bet!

August 8, 2011



## The Beginning and End of Practice

Guy Edson

How we start and end practices is important. We want a happy and safe beginning and end.

Many parents of newer, younger swimmers like to personally accompany their children on to the deck at the start of practice, watch practice, and then accompany their child off the deck. Here are some tips for a smooth parent to coach transfer of your young swimmer.

First, make sure your child has all the equipment they are going to need. Kickboard, fins, cap, goggles, and water bottle are the most common accessories in most programs. (Please write your children's name on all items.)

Next, please release your child directly to the coach and do not simply send your child to the pool side. The coach will want to warmly greet your child and give him or her instructions. Secondly, it alerts the coach as to who is here. This is especially important if you are late to practice -- always have the swimmer check in with the coach.

Next, step back, find a comfortable place, and watch with sheer joy your young one's swimming experience. And please, avoid contact with your swimmer so that their attention is on the coach.

How we end practice is as important as how we begin. Please do not approach the pool deck and take your child out of the water. It is the responsibility of the coach to officially end the practice and see to it that everyone is out of the water. Often, the coach wants to talk to the swimmers before they go, and, in our program our stroke school swimmers do a little cheer at the end of practice.

If you need to take your child from practice early, alert the coach at the beginning of practice (and again if necessary as the coach may forget) and allow the coach to get the swimmer out of the water. The coach then has the opportunity to say some nice parting words and has the knowledge that she has left the pool. Never take your child out of the water directly – always work through the coach.

August 15, 2011



“Teaching Hard Work to Parents As Well as Children”

By John Leonard

The above quote came from the former President of USA-Swimming, Coach Jim Wood of the Berkeley Aquatic Club of New Jersey, in response to a question “what can we do to improve American Swimming?” at a USA-Swimming Steering Committee meeting last January.

Jim, as many of you know, is a 40 year plus veteran of the coaching scene, and owns his own pool and program and has been a leader in USA-Swimming for many years. He currently is President of USA-Aquatic Sports, the umbrella organization for the Aquatic Sports in the USA, as they report to FINA. He’s produced Olympians, National Champions, great age group teams and runs a highly successful swim business and swim school.

And his statement rang a bell with me.

I do talks for parents all over the world, as well as in the USA. And I “part time coach” my own team here in Fort Lauderdale, so I can stay current with all the things coaches face on deck in our sport. A considerable percentage of the parents that coaches deal with regularly have changed significantly from 10-20 and certainly 30 years ago.

I always ask parents what factors have led to their current success in life. Invariably, the majority have stories of hardships faced, challenges met, hard times overcome, on the way to a solid life and family, fiscal security or any sort of success you want to mention.

After these stories, a majority of parents say some variation on “*boy, I don’t want my kid to have to go through that!*”

And I am always floored. *“you mean, you don’t want your child to experience the same formative experiences that you are describing as the ‘thing that made you what you are today’?”*

Invariably, they look at me blankly and then slowly it dawns on them what they are saying and the eyes go to the floor and you can almost hear an audible *“hmmm...”*

The natural response of any parent is to “protect” their child.

But let us not confuse “protect” with “shelter”. Children only really grow up under some pressure, some need to overcome something, the need to stretch, try harder, grow....in short, to GO TO WORK on something they care about.

The harder the work, the more satisfying the growth, maturity and individual strength created.

When we do something for our children that they are capable of doing themselves, we make them weaker. (not stronger) We want strong, independent children, yes? .....Yes?

When we let children do for themselves, they learn to work for what they want.

Just like you and I did. And most parents did. Hard work is good for all of us.

Have confidence in your child and let them grow. They will prove themselves as strong or stronger than you. But they need you to “give them something” to get there.....

...the Freedom to do the hard work themselves.

August 22, 2011



## **So This Is Competitive Swimming: For Newer Swim Parents**

Russ Sampson  
Head Coach, Clarence Swim Club, New York

First, let me start off by saying you have chosen the best sport for your child. The process of developing in an individual sport supports the life lessons that any parent would like to have instilled in their child. Character traits and lessons like time management, dedication, communication, goal setting, commitment, self improvement, sacrifice, overcoming obstacles, self worth, and pride. The reason I believe this to be the best sport for development for your child is simple. Like life, what you put into swimming, you get out of it. Like life, swimming isn't always easy; it isn't always exciting; it isn't always easy to love or even to like it. But like life, the rewards that it gives are the best kind: Pride in the journey and processes that you have taken to bring about a desirable outcome. Note the use of the word "outcome" and not "result". Desired results should almost invariably be faster than actual. Desired outcomes take into account the journey, the friendships, the character growth, the actual results, the training, the relationships with the coaches, and the respect all that deserves.

I would also like to say that you have chosen the best sport because of the professionalism in our structure. USA Swimming is the single most decorated, successful and structured of any youth sport in the world. Our club employs professional coaches with a passion for the sport and a strong concern for each of our swimmers. Our Learn To Swim program offers the best 10 step process towards not only teaching your swimmer all four competitive strokes and water safety, but preparing them for success in the competitive side of the sport, should they choose to continue. Other youth sports are known for using volunteer parents with little or no background/training in the sport they are coaching.

But patience is needed. Swimming can be a life-long endeavor. Success is relative to the competition you face, and there is ALWAYS better competition to be faced (one of the beauties of the sport!) Fast at 10 years old is not fast at 12. Being super fast at 12 may be marginal at 18 years old. And, often, slow at 10 does not mean slow at 18.

Understanding is needed. Our coaches have a plan, a structure and a direction for your swimmer. It includes the possibility of swimming in college (if the swimmer wants this) and a near continual progression through the sport with growth, development and results to bring about the desired outcome as noted before. Work with the coaches and support your swimmer. Communicate with the coaches and over time, take a back seat and allow your swimmer to communicate on their own behalf.

Knowledge is needed. Comparing your child to others is not healthy. Compare them to where they were a year ago, and what is reasonable for them to strive towards over the next year. If you have a 1<sup>st</sup> grader

learning multiplication, it is not reasonable for them to learn quantum physics by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. If you have two children, you see that they differ in the way they develop, learn, grow and mature and those differences are what makes them unique and special and not less or more adequate. Use the same principles when you start to wonder why Suzie, who used to be slower than your child in the pool is now seemingly light years ahead.

As we move forward in the sport, take great comfort that your children are surrounded by great people, from the swimmers they share a lane with, to the coaches and parents that help run this club. Involve yourself as much as you can in facilitating your child's efforts in this sport by getting them to practice and meets on time, by volunteering and/or officiating, by showing them that you care as much about their involvement as they do. Support them with kind words and appropriate praise for jobs well done. Let the coaches coach, and let yourselves be the compassionate support system.

August 29, 2011



## Parents "Are you a Winning Parent?"

Reprinted from Competitive Advantage – Sports Psychology Services and Resources [http://www.competitivedge.com/questionnaire\\_parents.htm](http://www.competitivedge.com/questionnaire_parents.htm)

Do you really want your child to excel and go as far as possible in his/her sport? Do you want him or her to have fun and feel good about him/herself? Would you like to help your child avoid becoming a dropout statistic? If your answers are "yes" to these questions then it is critical that you play the "right" role on the parent-coach-athlete team. Be supportive! Be your child's best fan! DON'T coach! (Unless you are the coach or your child comes to you and WANTS your feedback!) Take this questionnaire to see if you're doing everything possible to help your child have a successful and healthy sports experience.

**Answer each question with a 1, 2, 3 or 4. 1 = never true; 2 = occasionally true; 3 = mostly true; 4 = always true.**

- 1) I get really frustrated and upset when my child performs below his/her capabilities.
- 2) I give my child critical feedback on his/her performance after each game.
- 3) If I didn't push my child, he/she wouldn't practice.
- 4) If my child doesn't excel and win, I see very little point in them participating in their sport.
- 5) I can be very critical when my child makes mistakes or loses.
- 6) I set goals with my child in relation to their sport.
- 7) I think it's my job to motivate my child to get better.
- 8) I feel angry and embarrassed when my child performs poorly.
- 9) The most important thing for my child's sport participation is that they have fun.
- 10) I get really upset with bad calls by the officials.
- 11) Most coaches don't know what they are talking about.

- 12) I keep a performance log/journal/statistics on my child's performance so we can monitor his/her progress.
- 13) I feel guilty about some of the things I say to my child after they play.
- 14) I try to watch most practices so that I can correct my child when he makes mistakes.
- 15) When my child fails I can feel his pain and disappointment.
- 16) I think it's important that my child gets used to having coaches yell at him/her to help prepare him/her for life.
- 17) My spouse and I argue about how I treat my son/daughter in relation to his/her sport.
- 18) I try to help my child keep his/her failures and the sport in perspective.
- 19) I'm never very concerned about the outcome of my child's game/match/race.
- 20) I will not allow my child to be put down or yelled at by a coach.
- 21) If my child wasn't so defensive when it comes to my feedback, he/she could become a better athlete.
- 22) It's not my job to evaluate or criticize my child's performances.
- 23) I feel that my child owes us a certain performance level given all the sacrifices we've made for him/her.
- 24) I believe my child's sport belongs to him/her and not to me.
- 25) I just want my child to feel good about him/herself and be happy when he/she plays.

## **SCORING**

Add scores for questions #1-8, 10-14, 16, 17, 21 & 23. (If you answered question #2 with a "mostly true" you add 3 points to the total score.) Subtract scores for questions #9, 15, 18-20, 22, 24, & 25.

## **INTERPRETATION**

The higher the score, the more potential damage that you are doing to your child. High scores indicate that you are playing the wrong role on the team and if you continue, you will increase the chances of your child burning out, struggling with performance problems and dropping out. Low scores mean that you are on track and doing the things necessary to insure that your child has a positive and life-enriching sports experience. If you scored a:

60 – 50: You are doing everything in your power to seriously damage your child's self-esteem, ruin their sports experience and make them a candidate for long-term psychotherapy later on in their life. If you continue your ways, your child will most likely drop out of sports. If you force them to continue, chances are good that they will struggle with serious performance problems. On the off chance that they do achieve success, they will not be able to appreciate what they've accomplished. Finally, your long-term relationship with them will be seriously jeopardized because of your lack of perspective and behaviors.

49 – 39: You are not being supportive enough and are doing too many things wrong. You are over-involved and putting too much pressure on your child. You need to back down, chill out and let them enjoy their sport. This kind of a parental stance will drive your child out of sports.

38 – 20: You're OK, but you need some help getting unhooked. You need to be more consistently supportive and take less of a pushing/coaching role.

19 – 16: You are pretty much on track as a parent. You are positive and doing most of the right things to insure your child has a positive youth sports experience.

0 – 15: BRAVO!!!! You are truly a winning parent. You can give workshops to other parents on how to help your child become successful in their sport.