

My swimmer DQ'd. What should I do?

April 21, 2013

I am frequently asked by our team parents how to help their child improve, or not get DQ'd, or get faster. I wanted to share my response to one of our parent's emails as her question applies to all swimmers and all athletes for that matter. My ideas are not original. They come from a combination of USA Coaches trainings and clinics, as well as workshops taught by the 2012 USA Olympic coaching staff, and from articles and



recommendations from successful sports psychologists associated with swimming. I share these ideas with you in hopes that we can continue to partner in providing a strong, long-term, training environment for your swimmer and have fun all along the way! Coach Moon

"Time improvement is a slow process and not always the best way to measure success. The hardest thing a swimmer parent has to do is allow their swimmer to progress at their own pace. Even world class swimmers don't always swimming their best times; if they did they would be breaking their records all the time. But that is not the case. Sometimes a swimmer will train for 1-2 years just to try and lower their time by a fraction of a second (like Olympic athletes) and that requires incredible discipline and patience, and lots and lots positive feedback all along the way. We have to teach the swimmers and parents other ways to measure their success and recognize improvement or they can get discouraged and lose motivation.

The first thing to remember is to reward the "process" and "recognize skill improvement." Time measurement is a very limited and not always an accurate way to measure success. However, showing up every day, working hard, having a positive attitude are life skills that can help anyone; having a good attitude even when the weather is 40 degrees or the pool is cold; those are the qualities that make "great athletes: and more important "great kids" and build character. We try to reward "the process." We can say things like, "You looked strong in practice today" or "your backstroke kick looked great today" or "I saw you helping the coach, I'm so proud of you."

When a swimmer DQ's, we give them an opportunity to learn how to deal with disappointment and we give them a chance to become resilient, to learn from their mistakes, and overcome them. Some of the greatest lessons a person will learn will come from their failures and willingness to try again. If we become overly protective, never allowing our kids to fail or deal with disappointment, we do them a great disservice. We, as coaches, must continuously challenge your swimmer in order to induce improvement. Sometimes it will be a physical challenge, sometimes an emotional challenge. And as soon as they master one skill, we will challenge them in another area, always encouraging them to try new things, to face scary situations or new events. When they face that fear and work hard to overcome the obstacle, they gain confidence in themselves and they learn resilience.

Here is an example of the kind of encouragement that really helps the swimmers. A young swimmer pulled down with both arms on the back flip turn. He is only allowed to pull down with one arm once he rolls over which is why he was DQ'd. Once he masters this turn, we reward him by saying "Wow, I'm impressed how hard you've worked to learn a legal backstroke turn!" This may take him a month or a year to learn, but when he finally masters it, THAT is truly something to recognize and celebrate!

During practice, we work on skills specific to the backstroke turn constantly; the approach, the wall push, the kick, and the freestyle flip turn etc. are all basic necessities of a back turn. All the drills in DEV group are designed to move them towards doing a full turn or stroke. These basics are necessary in order to perform a legal backstroke turn.

Our DEV and INT swimmers still many many skills to learn and perfect. The more precise they become, the faster they will get, but this takes years. Swimming is a very difficult sport because it is highly technical. One of the best things you can do to help your swimmer improve is help keep them motivated to swim so they ENJOY it enough to attend regularly and of course, attend practice as frequently as possible. Swimmers attending 5 days a week will improve faster. And parents giving their kids encouragement for showing up and working hard every day and doing their best each day will also help them to improve faster. When parents become critical or start placing demands on their athlete to perform to their expectations they do the child a great disservice and even hinder their progress.

A one-on-one lesson with a coach periodically can be very valuable because it allows us to be very specific to your child's physical and emotional needs and believe me, we the coaches, looove to give the kids that personal attention! However, there is no replacement for consistent, regular attendance at practice and the strength and endurance that occurs as a result of the repetition of correct drills. We would be happy to set up a private lesson on the weekends with one of the coaches if you cannot get there on Friday before 3:30pm, or if the kids have a half day if we can coordinate schedules for private training. Coaches will be able to do more private instruction once school is out.

Thank you for taking the time to read this message. I hope it helps your swimmer by giving you some instructions on what to do the next time your swimmer DQ's, or comes in last place or doesn't want to go to practice. I also encourage you to click on this link and visit the USA Swimming Website section especially for parents. <http://www.usaswimming.org/DesktopDefault.aspx?TabId=2003> They answer every question a parent could ever ask about practice, what to expect from training, what to expect from coaches etc. I hope you get very familiar with this web site as it's probably the single most helpful thing you could do to help your swimmer improve, besides drive them to practice of course. Thanks for caring and always supporting your swimmers and the team!

Go SHARKS!

Coach Moon