



FRONT RANGE BARRACUDAS

CHARACTER • RESPECT • INTEGRITY

Short Course 2020, February
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**FEBRUARY
2020
NEWSLETTER**

PRACTICE POOLS EXPLAINED

We are just a week away from getting through our second and final girls' high school season without the use of BCC! The end of this challenging two-year journey is almost here. We love VMAC, it's our mother-ship, but by now you understand that sharing a facility that also is home to five different 5A high school teams, provides us with some logistical challenges. We can't fit all of our swimmers' practices in one pool and have our student athletes out of the building by a reasonable hour every evening. We have been very lucky to make use of Paul Derda Rec Center and Westminster City Pool during these nights where VMAC schedule logistics becomes difficult to impossible. I understand that we cannot provide a perfect schedule to all groups, but please understand that our staff spends a significant amount of time on each month's practice schedule. We'll go day-by-day and group-by-group to make sure that each group has the potential to have a great practice. We have a few inconsistent weeks ahead, with the heart of Boys' high school season around the corner, but after that we'll settle in to a groove with a more consistent schedule and hopefully more desirable practice times.

Some of the reason we have decided not to offer practices at Paul Derda or Westminster to some of the older groups is simply: the facilities do not allow for us to offer the most complete practice curriculum to those groups. Aside from blocks and permanent flags, both Paul Dera and Westminster provide great practice environments for our younger kids to work on almost every skill they need to improve on to get better. That's unfortunately not the case for some of our older swimmers. Water temperature is a huge factor here. Warm water is actually an asset for young swimmers. These groups might spend a large chunk of practice listening to coach explain drills or skills. Water temp allows them to concentrate on the coach rather than shivering. For older swimmers who are training and will have raised heart rates, training in warm water does not allow for us to complete what we need to do on most days. Think about training for a marathon when it's hot in the middle of summer, it might not go well...

Coach Andrew

WHAT HAPPENED TO RACING?



By SWIMSWAM, Dr. Zachary Hojnacki
January 20, 2020

How Was Your Race?

Coach: "Good job, how do you feel about that swim?"

"Swimmer: *shakes head* "That was terrible.

"Coach: "Why do you feel that way – your stroke technique was strong and efficient, and you executed the race well.

"Swimmer: "Because I added..."

Our program recently traveled across the country from New York to Arizona to compete in a terrific and uniquely formatted competition hosted by Phoenix Swim Club called the Arizona Dual Meet Championships. Aside from the benefits the team travel experience provided for our 14 & under athletes in their developmental process, the dual meet format brought out the best in our kids. It was a significant departure from the traditional weekend swim meet experience, where the emphasis is often on maximizing the number of events swum and personal best times achieved. This weekend was instead about racing: fighting for first not only for yourself, but for your team. Competition is pure and fun, and somewhat lacking in today's swim experience. I believe we have somewhat over-corrected and could benefit as a sport from shifting our emphasis back towards racing.

Where We Got Lost

I suspect that in the early stages of the sport, competition was the primary focus. Somewhere along the way, coaches and parents encouraged athletes to direct their attention towards improving their personal best times as a means to discourage obsessive comparisons to the success of other athletes, and to instead prioritize self-improvement. I agree that is a healthy and appropriate mindset, and that constant comparisons to other swimmers is a recipe for constant disappointment and discouragement.

However, it feels as though we have veered off course from what that mindset was originally intended to promote. Walking around the pool deck, speaking to my own athletes or listening to the conversations of others, times are often the only focus. Evaluation of race outcomes has become binary – drop time = good swim, add time = bad swim. As athletes grow older and less frequently perform their personal bests, their relationship with the sport begins to sour. Even as they understand that a personal best time is not a realistic expectation at certain phases of the season, there is a tendency to compare times to past seasons or to other swimmers in an effort to project taper times. If those times don't meet the swimmers' expectations, they are quick to panic and self-doubt creeps in. For some, there is a decreased willingness to compete in meets during the phases of training where fast swims are least likely, even as these competitions are important prerequisites for end-of-season breakthroughs.

What We Are Communicating to Young People

Parent: "Nice racing today! 3 out of 4 best times! We just need to fix that backstroke!" Parent: "What happened out there? Why were you so far off your best? Is something wrong?" Coach: *Emphatically* "You dropped 3 seconds!" As adults, we are culpable here. Post-race feedback is often littered with discussion about races in terms of total time, proximity to best, etc., rather than objective evaluation on the basis of execution of strategy, technical proficiency, or in the context of training performances and goals. We reward athletes for achieving personal best times by congratulating them and affirming the accomplishments as if they were solely a reflection of effort. The truth is that personal best times can be accomplished with less than maximal effort and poor execution, while swims slower than your previous best can be effortful and flawlessly performed.



SWIM



SWAM

The Stats

I believe that the overemphasis on racing times is somewhat dangerous, particularly for older athletes. The national average improvement percentage for a 15-16-year-old girl in 2019 was .93%. The picture for 17-18 girls was bleaker still, with an average of negative .3%. When our communications exclusively reward personal bests and demand explanation for swims that fail to meet that criterion, it implies that swimming our best is merely a reinforceable behavior as opposed to a complex and challenging long-term pursuit. This also suggests failure is always controllable and completely avoidable – which, in a sport where failure is incredibly common, is extremely demoralizing and **simply not true.**

It is important that our coaching leadership educate athletes on the impact growth and maturation has on performance in swimming, particularly for young girls. Besides keeping young people enrolled in the sport, perseverance often pays off for those that can transition into strong collegiate athletes. Each year, I sit down with our teenage swimmers to discuss how age and physical maturity may impact short-term outcomes in the near future. The examples of well-known Olympic athletes below illustrates how drawn out plateaus can be, but also how successfully navigating those challenging phases can pay dividends in the long-term.

Missy Franklin-

200 Bk:12->13: 2% improvement

13->14: 4% improvement

14->15: <1% improvement

15->16: 2% improvement (Olympic Qualifier)

16->17: <1% improvement (World Record) 1

Cammie Adams-

200 Fly:12->13: 0% improvement

13->14: 6% improvement

14->15: <1% improvement

15->16: 0% improvement

16->17: <1% improvement

17->20: No improvement (added time)

20->23: 3% improvement (Olympic Qualifier)

Let's Race!

Which brings me back to my original point. I think it's time to re-emphasize racing. In swimming, you have an opportunity to compete against seven or more others every time you dive in for a race. We are built to compete – the human body responds physiologically to competitive demands by providing chemicals that enhance performance. It is often when athletes get caught up in a great battle against the person next to them that they are able to give additional effort and energy that leads to extraordinary performances for both parties. Competition has a winner and loser, which forces young people to **learn how to be both.** There is a subtle distinction between confidence and arrogance, or humility and self-deprecation, and we as a society will benefit from cultivating the former of each. Racing also draws attention to realistic expectations for athletes of similar ages and in season phases; as we work to educate our young swimmers on how the competition calendar interfaces with season training plans, we can point to others and note that competing well within your heat is reflective of the fact that you are on the right path.



SWIM



SWAM

This shift in tone is important and necessary because our sport is at times brutal and unforgiving. Swimming requires an incredible sacrifice of time and a comparatively absurd workload to many other sports – and yet the payoffs are often infrequent. As coaches, our responsibility is to guide the swimmers through the hardest phases of the season so they can see success at the end of the tunnel. I think by encouraging and rewarding racing too, instead of simply performances times, we will find that our swimmers have another way to measure success, and subsequently have more fun and are more motivated as they see progress in one area when the other is stagnant, and vice versa. More importantly, I think it encourages a healthier relationship with the sport that could address some of the issues of attrition and end-of-career plateau that we too often see.

Coach: “Let’s not obsesses about how much you added or dropped from your personal best. Let’s discuss your racing splits, technical proficiency, and strategy in relation to recent training markers, the current season phase and your long-term goals. What does this race tell us about how we can continue to improve our daily preparation?”

Parent: “You raced hard today and I’m proud of you. I always love watching you swim.”

Key Takeaways

In my doctoral research at Arizona, I studied the roles that mindfulness and acceptance play in regulating performance under pressure in sports. There is compelling evidence that suggests that adopting a mindful, non-judgmental approach to daily practice in sports can enhance long-term performance outcomes (Gooding & Gardner, 2009; Thompson et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2016). I posit that this is in part because athletes that practice this approach are able to separate their emotional responses from their objective evaluations of performance outcomes and are therefore more likely to learn from failure and remain motivated. This is a daily approach to sports that leads to more **consistency and effort over time**, which ultimately is the **key to success in anything**. We can contribute to this healthier attitude about performance by being mindful of what we say to young people about their performances, encourage using multiple objective measures to evaluate outcomes. Finally, let’s remember that swimming is not just about times, but also racing. I think we would all do well to remind ourselves of that.

It's almost time for the **STATE CHAMPIONSHIP!** Our team is hosting the 14 and Under State Meet at the VMAC the weekend of **February 28th**. Many of you will sign up to volunteer by timing or taking on another job to ensure the meet runs smoothly, and that is very much needed and appreciated. Another way you can help involves assisting with a tradition of recognizing our state athletes through a fun project. Once again, we will be putting together goody bags for swimmers who are competing at this championship meet. We will have a better idea of the number of competitors after the upcoming dual meets, but in the past, it has typically been around 50 swimmers. This will be our 5th time around with this project, and we are ready to roll! **By the way, we are missing about 20 state bags from the last distribution. If you have one at home, can you please send it to the pool with your swimmer ASAP?** Thank you!

The collection and distribution of these goodies is a completely voluntary effort put on by the parents and is not sponsored by funds from the club. **Jennifer Raskay** is heading up this project again and would happily welcome your contributions of snacks, drinks, or other small items to make our athletes feel proud and fueled for success. Some of the great items included in the past were granola bars, fruit snacks, energy chews, Goldfish crackers, trail mix, Swedish fish, small plastic toy fish, small stuffed animal fish, coupon for entry to PDRC, juice boxes, chocolate milk, Gatorade, and more! Donations will be accepted starting **NOW until the deadline, which will be February 24th** in order to have the bags ready for distribution at the state practice the night before the meet begins.

If you would like to sign up to donate an item, please click on the link below. Items can be dropped off at the Raskay front porch (14020 Park Cove Drive in Broomfield, specifically McKay Landing), or arrangements can be made to meet at VMAC (or give items to Kyle in Elite group or Julia in Black group). If you make a delivery, please text Jennifer (303-886-5831 or jraskay@msn.com) to let her know. Items can be left anytime on the secure front porch, so please just leave them there when it is convenient for you.

To find out what is needed and sign up, please follow this link:

[Cuda State Goody Bags](#)

Thanks so much for your support!

Jennifer Raskay on behalf of Front Range Barracudas Swim Club



FEBRUARY **BIRTHDAYS**

Ethan Adams
Kaylee Austin
Kaine Combs
Jordan Dolan
Jaxson Fevos
Robert Harris
Abbie Kehmeier
Sydney Lawrence
Keanna Limes
Hunter Nebola
Sydney Pippert
Makenna Reiner
Isabella Schneider
Payton Setser
Johnee Shields
Ryler Slavik

