



FOUNDATIONS OF *Coaching*

Chapter 7: Evaluation

Table of Contents

Part 1: Athlete Evaluation

- Tracking improvement
- How to evaluate athletes

Part 2: Coach and Club Evaluation

- Aspects of coach evaluation
- Evaluating assistant coaches
- Evaluating the club as a whole



FOUNDATIONS OF *Coaching*

Part 1: Athlete Evaluation

Topic Questions:

1. Besides meet results, what are some aspects of athlete evaluation?
2. How can test sets be used to track performance and improvement?

Tracking Improvement

A coach and an athlete need to have measurement points along the way to measure improvement based on the training plan. The obvious first tracking area is the athlete's performance in swim meets. The key question should be "Is the athlete's performance in swim meets consistent with expectations based on the training load?" A coach may make necessary adjustments to the training based on performance in a meet.

Meet performance, however, is not the only way for a coach to track improvement. Another essential element to tracking improvement is the use of test sets in practice. Test sets should be designed to test the various energy systems that a coach is trying to overload and adapt. Run test sets every couple of weeks and be sure that they are run in the same consistent manner every time. Over time, results from test sets will give the coach and the athlete a more accurate picture of overall development than swim meet performance.

Test sets for young swimmers can be as simple as 10 x 50 on 60 seconds recording the swimmers' times for every 50. Instruct the swimmers as to how the set is to be completed. Possibilities include:

- Maintaining a consistent (average) time throughout the set and striving to improve the consistent (average) time each time the set is offered.
- Descending (getting faster) throughout the set.
- Starting out as fast as possible and maintaining the time for as long as possible.
- Dropping the interval (from 60 seconds, to 55 seconds to 50 seconds) each time the set is offered.
- Dropping the interval throughout the set and challenging swimmers to keep "making the interval." (Example, 2 x 50 on 60 seconds, 2 x 50 on 55 seconds, 2 x 50 on 50 seconds, 2 x 50 on 45 seconds.)

The same kind of set can be varied endlessly by altering the number of repeats, the repeat distances and the rest intervals, depending on the age and ability of the swimmers. The important thing is to set up the set consistently each time it is offered so that results can be tracked. Swimmers should be excited and motivated to participate in test sets. Posting of results, especially showing individual and group improvement, can be very motivational. Results that show a lack of improvement or even a decline in performance must be analyzed. Are the swimmers too tired? Unmotivated? Bored? Has the set been offered too often? Is it too difficult?

Athlete Evaluation

When evaluating the success of athletes, be sure to evaluate their performance based on their goals, their potential, the effort they have put forth and finally, the outcome of the event. Chart best time progress and achievement of personal goals. Subjectively evaluate improvement in technique and chart milestones in training improvement based on test sets or ability to complete progressively harder sets. Also, keep track of athlete attendance, since it is virtually impossible to improve without coming to practice. Athlete evaluation is particularly relevant when decisions are made about moving an athlete to a higher training group versus retaining an athlete in the current training group or perhaps dropping the athlete down a level. Both parents and swimmers will want to know the reasoning behind the decisions. The more objective measurements that are tracked, the more weight there will be behind the decision.



FOUNDATIONS OF *Coaching*

Part 2: Coach and Club Evaluation

Topic Questions:

1. What is the purpose of evaluation?
2. What are some aspects of a coach's work that should be evaluated in addition to athlete performance?
3. Where do assistant coaches fit into the evaluation process?
4. What is the coach's role in evaluating the success of the club?

Coach Evaluation

Evaluation is an ongoing process and within a swim program there should be evaluation of the club as a whole, of the governing board (if there is a board) and of the coaches, both individually and as a staff. Evaluation should be constructive and positive and should not be used punitively since the purpose of evaluation is growth and improvement. It is the responsibility of the head coach to evaluate the assistant coaches, while the board or employer evaluates the head coach. A coach-owner is encouraged to establish a self-evaluation process.

Even if there is no formal evaluation process, coaches should evaluate themselves individually throughout the season and at the conclusion of the season. Coaches should also set individual coaching-related personal goals. Individual coaching goals might include such things as continuing education, season planning, punctuality and involvement in the LSC.

The evaluation of a coach focuses on how the coach's performance supports club goals, mission and objectives. As much as possible, the evaluation concentrates on measurable, objective aspects of the coach's work rather than on subjective opinions. A summary includes the major strengths and weaknesses of the coach and areas for future improvement. Outcome and performance of the athletes will, of course, be part of the coach's evaluation, but the entire evaluation should not be based on athlete performance.

What, then, are some areas that should be evaluated? Generally speaking, the primary areas of evaluation should come directly from the coach's contract and job description. The contract and job description should list what is expected of the coach. "On deck" areas of responsibility include coach-athlete interaction, teaching skills, practice management and meet management. Each one of those areas would have several specific responsibilities. Administrative areas of responsibility include meets, office duties, communication, planning, team growth and knowledge. Each of these would have several specific responsibilities. A final section might include various people skills and personal management issues.

Here is a partial list of other measurable items that could be included in a formal, informal or self-evaluation.

- Performance at end of season meets
- Comparison of swimmers' best time progress
- Retention of athletes throughout the season and from season to season
- Growth of the program
- Number of swimmers who meet specific time standards
- Timely completion of administrative duties
- Personal growth as measured by educational development
- Educational sessions conducted for parents or team members

Are there areas that should not be evaluated by a board? Yes, there are. Technical issues are out of bounds for an evaluation done by board members. Issues such as taper, balance of anaerobic and aerobic work, appropriate yardage for 12 year olds and event selection are not board issues. These are technical issues for which there is not a single universally acceptable answer. They are topics that should be discussed and possibly researched among the coaching staff. The bottom line for the board is "Are the athletes improving, is the team improving, and are they happy with their progress?"

Evaluating Assistant Coaches

Since assistant coaches work for, are trained by, and are supervised by the head coach, they should be evaluated at least twice a year by the head coach. The evaluation should be based on what assistant coaches are asked to do. Assistant coaches should have written job descriptions detailing their responsibilities, authorities and standards of performance.



FOUNDATIONS OF *Coaching*

The head coach creates a job description for each assistant coach based on:

- What the head coach needs from that position
- The skills of the assistant coach
- The commitment level of the assistant coach

The [American Swimming Coaches Association](#) offers personal assistance and has documents for coaches and employers for establishing evaluations and contracts. Call 800-356-2722 for more information.

Club Evaluation

Although the coach will be most interested in swimmer performance in the pool, the coach must also be an integral part of ongoing club evaluation and improvement. It is vital that the club has written goals, based upon its values and philosophy, which were arrived at in a cooperative effort with staff and board. These goals should be the driving force of the daily activities of the staff and board. Clubs should conduct periodic evaluations to determine if the organization is fulfilling its mission and accomplishing its goals. The coaching staff should be a vital source of information when evaluating the club and determining what the club does well and what it can do better. Coach input on retention rates, improvement statistics, attendance, meet participation and achievement of competitive success is vital to evaluating the club's progress. USA Swimming's [Club Recognition Program](#) is an outstanding tool for clubs to use to monitor achievement and progress.