

TO: MCDA Parents & Swimmers
FROM: Megan Pittman, Head Coach
DATE: October 8, 2012
RE: Weekly Memo

CONTENTS

Sunrise Swimming Invite

Comments Relative to Meets

Swim-A-Thon: Keeping Friends Afloat, October 13

Upcoming Dates and Deadlines

Practice Schedule Reminders

I. SUNRISE SWIMMING INVITE

This past weekend, several MCDA swimmers competed in one of their first sanctioned swim competitions at the Sunrise Civic Center in Broward County. The event was great, and our swimmers' participation is a true testament to the excitement, enthusiasm and hard work these kids are putting in each day! When you see these swimmers around deck this week (see attached list), please be sure to give them a word of congrats and a high five for a job well done!

The participation of so many of our swimmers also provides a great opportunity for the coaching staff to analyze overall progress, identify general weaknesses, and adapt/evolve our next training cycle to produce ongoing success.

II. A FEW ADDITIONAL COMMENTS RELATIVE TO MEETS:

1. MCDA Philosophy of Competition
2. Races Should Be Challenges
3. The Value of A Disqualification

1. Our philosophy of competition.

In over a decade of coaching high caliber USA Swimming teams, I've come across various opinions and philosophies from a wide array of coaches, relative to competition. Some coaches believe that a swimmer should be perfect at all strokes before ever stepping foot in a competitive venue. This approach works fine in theory; kids become involved in a program, coming to practice once a week or so, and after a few years, a swimmer learns enough to enter a competition and race at the age group level. However, in reality, few kids are interested enough in swimming to practice once per week for years, only finally getting a chance to race after they've put in the requisite number of training hours and their gross motor skills line up to create expected movement patterns. This philosophy works well for programs having several hundred swimmers, and the coaching staff simply hopes the cream will rise to the top.

On the other hand, some programs believe that swimmers are most motivated, excited and retain interest in swimming when they can actually get up and race early on in their

developmental phases as a swimmer. At MCDA, this is our competitive philosophy. The best part about swimming is the racing! And, in my experience, the swimmer who gets to race - early and often in their swim careers - is the swimmer who sticks with the sport, constantly improves, achieves increasingly higher levels of success, and looks back fondly at their novice swim years, remembering all the fun they had and everything they learned along the way. Racing makes what we do at practice very real, in a way that one can only experience firsthand!

2. Races should be challenges.

At MCDA, we are committed to building champions for life. Swimming is simply an arena for teaching life skills like effort, perseverance, commitment and hard work. Daily, we strive to create an environment where a true commitment to excellence is valued, and as a result, the development of the whole child is inevitable. Real success, self-confidence and pride in a job well done can only be realized when a swimmer buckles down and focuses on improving oneself through a cyclical process of failing forward. When a swimmer races in an event that is a reach for their current ability level, the swimmer displays courage! When a swimmer races in an event, surrounded by kids who have been swimming for years, the swimmer is exposed to real competition! When a swimmer races in an event and gets disqualified, the swimmer learns perseverance! And, when a swimmer races in an event, some weeks later, and shows huge leaps of improvement, the swimmer; the person; the champion for life, blossoms and grows in a manner one only experiences by facing, refusing to back down and dealing with adversity!

3. The Value of a Disqualification

Swimming is a technical sport. Developing technical skills (swimming technique) takes teaching, time, practice, and repetitions. As swimmers develop, they become more fit, more skilled, and become better at performing swimming skills the right way for more of each swim. A swimmer might know the right thing to do, but cannot do it for a whole race (that's where the fitness part comes in), or they might not know or remember the right way to do it (that's where the coaching and learning part comes in). To improve swimmers' skill levels - and that should lead to less DQs - swimmers need to practice the same way they will swim in a meet. If swimmers always do proper wall touches, or kicks in practice, then they should also be that way in a swim meet. If swimmer does not practice the correct skills with focus and self-discipline, or if swimmers do not fully comprehend the proper way to do certain skill elements, or if swimmers do not understand their approach to certain skills is incorrect, a disqualification in a meet can be a huge learning advantage.

A coach can work with a swimmer continuously on a certain skill, or reiterate certain technical skills in practice until the coach is blue in the face, but sometimes, the lesson doesn't really solidify for the swimmer until a stranger in a uniform (a meet official) approaches the swimmer after a race and informs the swimmer of a technical deficiency. More often than not, this delivery from an official, at a competition, can really convince the swimmer that certain skills really do require more of the swimmer's focus and attention at practice.

For novice level swimmers, a DQ can tell the coach what type of skill work is needed; more practice or increased emphasis on certain things - whether for the whole group or for individual swimmers. A DQ is a tool for the coach and for the swimmers to learn what to do in future practices.

Is a disqualification a failed attempt at something? Yes, it is, but it can be and should be, a positive failure; one that will lead to future excellence. Part of becoming a better swimmer is testing limits and not being afraid of failing. Learning to accept the possibility of failing, overcoming a fear of failure, not letting the chance of failing stop attempts to do things, and allowing failure to inspire the desire to do things better, leads to DQs being useful, acceptable, positive moments.

Should a swimmer be entered in an event when the coach thinks the swimmer is likely to be disqualified in that event? That depends upon several factors, but for novice swimmers it is one of the best tools at a program's disposal. Put swimmers in events to see what they know; competitive swimming is best seen or judged in a competitive environment - that is a swim meet! Enter novice swimmers in events that they should know how to do, even if they may not have mastered the event yet, yields concrete feedback on what to do to improve. If the coach, the swimmer and the swimmer's family approach DQs in this fashion, such experiences can be immensely useful and productive in the long run.

III. SWIM-A-THON: KEEPING FRIENDS AFLOAT

Miami Country Day School Homecoming is this week, and as part of our team's commitment to develop socially responsible young citizens, MCDA is hosting a Swim-A-Thon, dubbed "Keeping Friends Afloat" on Saturday, October 13, 2012, from 11:00am-12:00pm. Participation in this event is completely voluntary, and suggested donations of \$20 or more will all go towards the local Women's Cancer Association – "Heidi Hewes Chapter" and the Sylvester Cancer Research Center. All participants will receive a commemorative t-shirt. The Swim-A-Thon challenge is based on maximum laps completed in one hour. Participants do not have to be MCDA team members or MCDS students. Anyone is welcome to join! Prizes will be awarded for the greatest number of laps completed in each age group (8U girls; 8U boys, 9-10 girls; 9-10 boys; 11-12 girls; 11-12 boys; 13-14 girls; 13-14 boys; 15-18 girls; 15-18 boys; 19 and up women; 19 and up men).

IV. UPCOMING DATES & DEADLINES

MCDA Intrasquad Swim Meet, October 20; register online by October 15

All MCDA swimmers are highly encouraged to attend this event. Warmups at 2:15pm; meet start at 3:00pm; meet ends at 5:00pm, and will be followed by a team BBQ.

Neptunes Developmental Invite, November 3-4; register online by October 22

UPDATE AS OF 10/8/12: THIS MEET IS THE SAME WEEKEND AS INTERSCHOLASTIC SWIMMING REGIONAL COMPETITION; DEPENDING ON THE MEET INFORMATION FOR THIS EVENT (the order of events; age group divisions) and THE NUMBER OF SPARTAN SWIMMERS QUALIFYING FOR REGIONALS, MCDA MAY NOT ATTEND THIS

EVENT IN LARGE NUMBERS. SWIMMERS, AGES 12 AND UNDER, ARE HIGHLY ENCOURAGED TO ATTEND THE TURKEY CLASSIC ON NOVEMBER 10, INSTEAD OF THIS MEET .

Turkey Classic, November 10; register online by October 29

This is a really great meet for all our 12 and under swimmers. Swimmers will compete in a 50 of each stroke; the final times from each of the 4 events will be added together to produce the all-around winners. The top 8 swimmers from each age group (8U, 9-10, 11-12) will receive trophies.

V. PRACTICE SCHEDULE REMINDERS

1. No Practices:

- Due to home meet for JV/Varsity Spartan Swimming, no practices on the following dates:
October 9
October 15
October 18

The interscholastic season for Spartan Swimming will conclude at the end of this month. While many Spartan swimmers will continue to swim, as part of the MCDA club team, there will not be home dual meets during the week that require the cancellation of Red/Blue/Advanced Blue practices after October. Thanks for your understanding and cooperation during this Fall 2012 interscholastic swim season.

2. Pumpkin Carving Extravaganza

On October 30, we will have a Halloween practice and Pumpkin Carving Extravaganza! Stay tuned for more details!

.....

As always, please let me know if you have any questions (pittmanm@miamicountryday.org; cell 305-586-8119).

Thanks for being part of the MCDA family, and see you at the pool!

Coach Pittman