



SWIM MEET PROTOCOL FOR PARENTS

Enthusiastic parental support has been a hallmark that Swim teams have always embraced, and is encouraged by our coaching staff.

This kind of parental involvement is not only strongly encouraged, but it is absolutely essential to the success of our program and each of our swimmers. In order to channel this support in a positive and effective way, however, it is necessary to establish clearly defined parameters and guidelines that will enable us to provide a competitive environment for our swimmers that will be the most conducive to their success and development.

The first of ten “Do’s and Don’ts for Parents” published by USA Swimming is, “Remain in the spectator area at competitions”. Although this may seem foreign and even divisive to a parent who is accustomed to the local swimming scene, it makes more sense when you think about it in light of normal protocol for virtually any other sport (or even for our sport in other parts of the country). How many of us would expect to see parents on the bench, or on the field or court at a football game, or basketball game, or baseball game, etc., etc.?

There is actually some very logical rationale behind this advice from USA Swimming:

- “Too many cooks in the kitchen” (i.e. swimmers, parents, coaches) makes it more difficult to establish a distraction free environment that is necessary to better enable the swimmers to focus and concentrate on the task at hand.
- Too much “hand holding” by the parents will delay the development of self reliance, responsibility and accountability by the swimmer.
- Swimmers will often feel an inordinate amount of pressure from a well intended but “overly supportive” parent.
- Although the parents make many significant sacrifices in support of their swimmers, it is the swimmers who work together lap after lap, day after day, week after week to prepare for competition. Over time, they develop a special bond that is almost always stronger and more effective in an “athlete only” environment. The competition is their show and the pool deck is their stage.

Needless to say, there can be some common sense exceptions to these guidelines. For example, we may sometimes welcome parental assistance on deck for novice swimmers in an 8 & under meet. Common sense also needs to be applied at venues where the team area and spectator area are one and the same. Even in these situations though, it is desirable to establish some separation of athletes and parents (i.e. swimmers in one section of the bleachers/deck, parents in an adjoining section).

The second of the ten Do's and Don'ts is, "Don't advise the coach on how to do the job", and the third is, "Don't coach your child during the meet". The "Parents' Handbook" published by USA Swimming cautions parents not to "undermine the professional coach by trying to coach your child on the side. Your job is to provide love and support and a safe (and warm) place to return to at the end of the day... The coach is responsible for the technical part of the job. You should not offer advise on technique or race strategy or any other technical area...you should be encouraging and never criticize your child or the coach."

You may be wondering if this applies in a situation where the parent believes that he/she knows more about the technical needs of the swimmer than does the coach. The answer is a resounding, "YES!!!" The reason is that confidence in the coach and the program is even more fundamental to the success of the swimmer than is the technical competency of the coach or the soundness of the program. If the swimmer senses that the parent questions the technical competency of the coach, this confidence can be undermined, especially if the swimmer respects the technical knowledge of the parent! If the parent cannot support the coach in this regard, it would be far more productive to make a program change than to openly challenge the competency of the coach. Even if the parent does not directly challenge or contradict the coach, confusion and uncertainty will result if the swimmer is getting mixed signals from the coach and parent.

Dr. Suzie Tuffey, the former Sport Psychology Director of USA Swimming did extensive research on the influence of parents on the athletic development and performance of successful swimmers. In her conclusion, Dr. Tuffey said, "Taken in conjunction, it seems that kids want parents to be a presence in their swimming but they want this presence to be one of unconditional support with little advice. In essence, the kids seem to be saying, 'Mom and Dad, support my efforts but don't try to help me swim faster'."

It is important to note that these guidelines are not meant in any way to discourage enthusiasm and cheering (the same as you would at a football game, basketball game, etc.). In fact, the sixth of the ten Do's and Don'ts is, "Cheer for your team" and the seventh is "Show interest, enthusiasm, and support for your child". One of the three team goals for the Sarasota Swim Academy every time we compete is to be the most spirited team in the meet. This includes the parents!!! Again, enthusiastic support and involvement of the parents will always be a hallmark of this program and is essential to our ongoing success. These guidelines and parameters are intended to harness this support and enthusiasm in a way that will provide the optimal training and competition environment for our swimmers and enable them to "Be the BEST that They Can Be". Parents, thank you for

your support and sacrifices!!!