

WEEKLY UPDATES

Week of Feb 12 Reminders

Practice Schedules and Deadlines

Changes to the [NORMAL](#) Practice Schedule:

- Normal Practice MONDAY and TUESDAY
- Wednesday, the Seniors/JrReds will practice from 4:15-5:45pm, and EVERYONE will be in the water for the Valentines/I ❤️ ASL practice from 5:45-7:15pm
- There will be NO workouts from Thursday-Monday this week, as the staff will be traveling for meets. (Athletes headed to Atlanta, plan on being at the pool for 60min anytime from 3pm-7pm on Thursday).

Upcoming Deadlines:

- Penultimate call for registered for the Winter League FINALS! [Brave vs Strong](#) on Friday night and [Fierce vs Proud](#) on Saturday morning...
- For any athletes NOT attending Atlanta/Fayetteville this weekend and NOT attending SMOC in March, the [GA/SPAC Raffle Meet](#) will be a great meet to bridge the 'racing' gap between now and [Divisionals](#) at the end of March. They give away some great prizes, with tickets being given out for time drops, heat wins, etc.

Other Programming Notes:

- Parents doing pickup/dropoffs, **please do not dropoff, pickup, idle, or park in the fire lane at the AAC.** That is an emergency lane only. If you are waiting for your athletes, please do so in one of the two lots, in a parking space. Cars coming around the corner cannot see the athletes walking out into the lots, and vice versa. This is a safety issue for the athletes. Please make the necessary adjustments to your drop-off/pick-up routines. Thank you!



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Coaches Corner

What Makes An Athlete “Special”

by **Coach Greg** on Feb 12

Buckle up, folks, this is a longer post- apologies ahead of time...

It's championship season, and as is customary, everyone is excited to race and see the fruits of their labor over the last six months of training/competing. I shared a quote with the Senior Group back in December that has really settled in my brain since then. I can't let go of it.

A lot of times, when I'm talking with other coaches, we'll ask each other. “How'd your meet go?”, and I have found that more and more in the last few years, my answer is simply- “Just about everyone got what they earned”. And this quote, below, puts some clarity behind those feelings.

“We don't rise to the level of our expectations, we fall to the level of our preparation.”

Over the last 20 years, I've seen countless athletes jam a turn at a big meet, and 99.9% of the time, it's because that's the first time that athlete has approached a wall at that velocity, and they weren't prepared for flipping earlier to adjust. They would have had more 'gliding in' approaches than 'racing in' approaches in training. I can make this analogy for every mistake we see in competition, but I don't want this to be a novel. The point is- we've SEEN all the mistakes already. Dozens, if not hundreds of times in training.



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And while I believe in positive thinking, good vibes, belief in one's self, that needs to be based on *something*. There has to be something concrete under it. It's a LOT easier to have positive thoughts and belief in yourself if you KNOW you've done what you need to do in training. Those things fall flat when that buzzer goes off and it's racing time. It brings to mind the Mike Tyson quote- "Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth." While crude, it's what happens in this sport all the time. When the buzzer goes off, all that matters is if you've prepared for the hurt or not.

Now- many of you have athletes that don't necessarily 'hurt' during races just yet. They are too young, their bodies don't create any meaningful amount of lactic acid, etc. But eventually, that changes. Their bodies change, grow, develop muscles, which make them faster, but there is a COST. And the cost is, essentially... pain.

And they cannot feel that pain for the first time in a race. They've got to numb themselves to it in training. An athlete can have all the most pretty strokes and turns and streamlines in the world, but if they can't doing them under duress, they won't be there for them in competition.

Which brings me to the title of this Coach's Corner... What makes an athlete 'special'? I've thought a lot about this recently, as we're heading into the "last 50" with a few of our athletes. Something that happens a lot in swimming (and I would assume all sports, and academics, etc), is that when shown someone who is achieving at a high level doing the little details with focus and determination, people brush this off as 'oh, well, if I was as good/fast/smart as them, I'd be able to/would do that, too'.

And I think that is the BIGGEST mistake folks make, and I am now, in my 22nd year of coaching, able to see WHY they make that mistake.



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They aren't standing where I stand. They're in the water, alongside these folks. They don't SEE the growth, 50 after 50, 100 after 100. And being younger, they often have short term memories, and forget where that 'special' athlete came from.

So now I'm going to share the story of Olivia Stewart (Senior Red, Proud House). Olivia is in her senior year of high school, and as many of you may already know, just finished in the top 16 @ Junior Nationals, and last week swam the 100 Breaststroke in a time of 1:00.24, which was under the previous Georgia HS Record (the record is now with the girl who just touched her out in 59.91). Pretty awesome stuff. And it's easy to look at her in training, and say, 'oh, well, yeah, she's doing these fast times, and focusing on turns/pullouts so well, because she's so good'.

But, it's THE EXACT OPPOSITE... She's so 'good', because she shows up every day and works really hard to swim fast in practice, and focuses so hard on her flaws/areas needing improvement.

Her journey is a great story, and one that should serve as an inspiration to everyone on ASL. Olivia re-joined ASL in January of 2020, my 2nd month in Augusta. I remember her and a friend coming into what was the previous version of the Junior Blue group as 8th graders, having transferred in from the Augusta Y program, where she had been swimming for the last 3 years. Olivia was with ASL for a couple years from 9-11, swimming a couple days a week and only at home meets in Augusta. With the Y, even at 13-14 years old, it was maybe even less practicing and meets.

I watched her swim in the Junior Blue group, and to be honest, she was just OK. A little raw, sloppy turns, but maybe there was something there. Then Covid happened. While the main group of 13-overs did 11x Zoom drylands a week throughout that period, Olivia hadn't really been with us long enough to feel a part of the group, so she wasn't in those.



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We got back in the water in July, but Olivia didn't re-start with us until September. She was in the "D" (more instructional, rather than training) group of HS aged kids, swimming at West Lake from 7-8pm each night. She immediately caught my eye as someone who was able to take a bit of coaching and work on it, finding faster ways of moving through the water. Not always nailing it, but you could see the attempt at making the change.

In December of her Freshman year, she swam her first HS meet and went a 1:22 in the 100y Breast. Which was a 6 second drop from her time at the Y the year before.

By January she went 1:13 and qualified for the HS State meet. In February, she went 1:09 at finals in the HS State meet. She went 1:07 in March at Divisionals...

Not a single one of those results shocked me. She was already impressing the Senior Group in practice every day, with some of the older girls in the group initially asking me why I assigned her to the Senior White group when the Aquatic Center re-opened in December, but by March, commenting on how hard she was working. She was TRAINING at a 1:07 level in January.

Then... Her family moved to Statesboro. 80min away.

I remember talking to her folks about joining SEGA, the team down there. They were having none of it, saying Olivia didn't want to switch. I remember telling them that she's a teenage girl, we're the adults, we gotta do what's best for her, and driving 80min a day was NUTS.

But she insisted, and they came to an agreement that for her Sophomore year, she'd train on her own down in Statesboro 2-3 days a week doing our workouts on her own, and her father would drive her up to Augusta the other 3-4, staying with her grandmother on the weekends.



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Training for swimming on your own... it's not easy. It's not fun. It's brutal. But she did it. And her dad got her to Augusta for the other 3-4 workouts. And when she came to the AAC you could see how grateful she was to be there with teammates, and she really made it count. Her training got even MORE focused, working even harder. That December, a year after going 1:22, she went a 1:05 at Georgia Senior Champs as a Sophomore.

She got her license that spring, and began doing the drive herself... EVERY DAY. We're 2 full years into her driving herself, and I'm not exaggerating to say this- she has not missed a single practice in TWO YEARS that I haven't insisted she skip. In fact, the only 'struggles' I've ever had with Olivia was her pouting when I tell her to stay home and swim in Statesboro so she can catch up on some sleep, which happens once or twice a season. She's been EVER PRESENT in the Senior Red group for 3 years.

Last fall, the college recruiting process began in earnest. She was coming off a solid summer, where she dropped some big time in LCM, but she was 1:05 in the 100 Breast at that point. She began talking to some mid-major division 1 schools, some upper-level division 3 schools, etc. But in December of her Junior Year at Georgia Senior State she went a 1:02.8 in the 100 Breast, making Junior Nationals.

We arrived in Greensboro, and reached out to some of the coaches we saw in the stands (this is one of the few meets coaches actually travel to watch swimmers compete in). She talked to about 15 schools that week- Georgia, Kentucky, LSU, Ohio State, Auburn, South Carolina, Duke, UNC, Pitt, Virginia... I had heard from a couple of the club coaches that they overheard the college coaches talking about Olivia at the bar playing pool after Finals one night. Her December progression made her a pretty intriguing prospect- 1:22, 1:05, 1:02. That, combined with the drive from Statesboro showed a determination that most programs covet.



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She went 1:01.9 a couple of months later, at HS States. That was about a year ago to the day now, and I vividly remember our first conversation when she came back to practice. She was pretty excited that she finished the 2nd 50 in 32.6, which was her first time finishing under 33 seconds. She always had some raw speed, but faded... and she connected that for the two weeks leading in, she was doing a handful of 32-mids from a push (no dive) in practice. So I asked her, "OK, so using that logic... what do you need to be hitting in practice to get yourself under 1:00?" And she responded 31-mid. So we began the quest to hold 31s in training.

In the meantime, she had narrowed things down to a handful of schools, setting up some visits for the spring. Her 3 official visits were Ohio State, Auburn and LSU. She had a great time at all 3, but in the end, her heart was in Auburn- she loved the campus, it felt 'right' with the team, and she connected with the assistant coach (who was an NCAA Champion in the 100 Breast himself). So it was a done deal. She was headed to Auburn to study and swim!

This is where it would have been easy to coast out the remaining year, and relax. Stay in Statesboro, make life a bit easier, etc. But really, what happened was, Olivia got hungrier. She qualified for Summer Junior Nationals (a little faster than Winter Juniors), and went to Irvine, California for the meet. I think she had a similar experience to Amy Riordan the year before- she found a level of competition that was like nothing else. That meet is just... DIFFERENT. Once you get there, you never wanna go back.

Coming off that experience, she came back this fall and we got back to work to hit those 31-mids. The group was working HARD this fall. I threw everything I could at them, and there were times where they were extremely broken down, physically and emotionally. Even 32-mids were hard to find for Olivia. But she kept grinding. It wasn't easy for her, and there were a few days where she was struggling with it all... But coming into the Thanksgiving season, we started to rest, get their bodies back to performing.



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She went to the Senior State meet, and went 1:00.99. Her 2nd 50 was a 32.01. She was pleased with the best time, but visibly annoyed that she came home 32. We went to Winter Juniors again, this time, she scored in both the 100 and 200 Breaststrokes, beating all athletes from Georgia, and putting her amongst a group of girls she was firmly chasing a year before.

But after that, during Christmas training, her confidence was back- we were working hard again, but not with the volume we did in the fall. She started hitting 31-mids in practice coming out of training camp, in early January. One of the factors was her pullouts, which she struggled with at Juniors, getting beat handily by several girls at her time. But again- her determination to problem solve and attack weaknesses turned those pullouts into assets, rather than liabilities... and at HS states last week, she went 1:00.24, coming home in 31.52 and just missing the 1:00 barrier.

And again- this did NOT surprise me. Now that we're using the Tritonwears, I had been seeing the 31-mids for weeks. In talking with some coach friends, I told them I would not be surprised to see her break 1:00. A couple scoffed- one even saying "Dude, she just dropped a full second back in December, as a SENIOR. You think she's got another full second drop in her? Crazy."

But again, I was watching her go 31-mids. I was seeing her pullout data improve (depth, velocity off the wall, power of her push-off, time on the wall, etc.). And now that she's been 1:00.24, she knows the .3 is gonna come from the start. So I've no doubt that in the coming weeks, she's going to address that with the same determination and focus as she's attacked everything. And she won't stop there. Because this is the 'secret sauce'. This is what makes her, and most athletes, 'special'. It's not some physical talent- she's average build, average height. She never once qualified for 14-Under State Champs. She hasn't 'always just been good'. She's MADE herself good, through **SHOWING UP, WORKING HARD, FINDING FAST, and BEING NEXT** (see what I did there?).



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See- I'm not sad to see Olivia go off to Auburn in the fall. Sure, we'll miss her, but I absolutely cannot wait to see what she can do when her commute isn't 80 minutes, alone in her car, EACH WAY to practice every day, and it's instead a 10 minute walk from her dorm. I desperately want her to have it easy, for once! At Auburn, she'll walk to a world class weight room and swim with world class training partners- and I know this much... SHE WILL COMPETE!!!

She's earned the opportunity to go to one of the top programs in the country and doing this thing she's loved doing these last 9 years. Now... if you scroll back up to the bottom of page 5 (again, sorry!), I put ***'s around a sentence.

THAT was the moment Olivia became 'Special'. The moment she told me and her parents to STUFF IT, and decide to jump through HUGE obstacles to continue doing this thing she loved. It could have failed spectacularly... she could have not been disciplined with her sleep and homework, and when those things fell behind, she would have been exhausted at the pool, and trained without focus and determination...

And throughout all this, I can probably count the number of conversations I've had with her folks on two hands. Some big chats, to be sure, back at the start about the 'decision'. But since then, we have talked about her travel logistics, her options when making her college choice, and when I need their help to keep her home from time to time. **This has been, and continues to be, Olivia's journey.** Her choices, which we support. (This is a common thread amongst the majority of athletes who get to that Junior National level).

It was a HUGE risk. And in hindsight- *she was right and I was wrong.* And I've never been happier to be wrong, and have enjoyed every last second of her journey to this point. And as excited as I am to see her carry on in the coming years- I'm equally excited to see WHO'S NEXT...



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Olivia wasn't the first one to figure out the "ASL WAY", Rachel Fulton (Olympic Trials '21, GaTech), and Amy Riordon (Junior Nationals finalist, South Carolina, headed to NCAA Championships next month) already blazed a trail for Olivia to follow. Both of them, in different ways, saw those core values make a huge difference in their swimming. All three girls are different, had different journeys through this sport, but all three 'got it'. It wasn't about gifts, talent (whatever that means), or wanting it... It came down to DOING IT.

And she won't be the last- we've got more kids on ASL heading down that path than ever before. Doing the things they need to be doing at the stage of their development, checking off the boxes... so that when it's their turn to 'DO IT', they've got the skillset, the mindset and the background to make it happen.

I'm attaching the screenshots from Olivia's practice 5 nights before she came home 31.52 at HS States... and the splits from the meet itself, so that we can see that EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS AT MEETS, HAPPENS FIRST AT PRACTICE. Good or bad, makes no difference. **We fall to the level of our preparation.**

#ASLBrave #ASLFierce #ASLProud #ASLStrong
#ShowUp #WorkHard #FindFast #BeNext #TheASLWay
#WhosNext #LetsGO #ASLChampsSeason2024

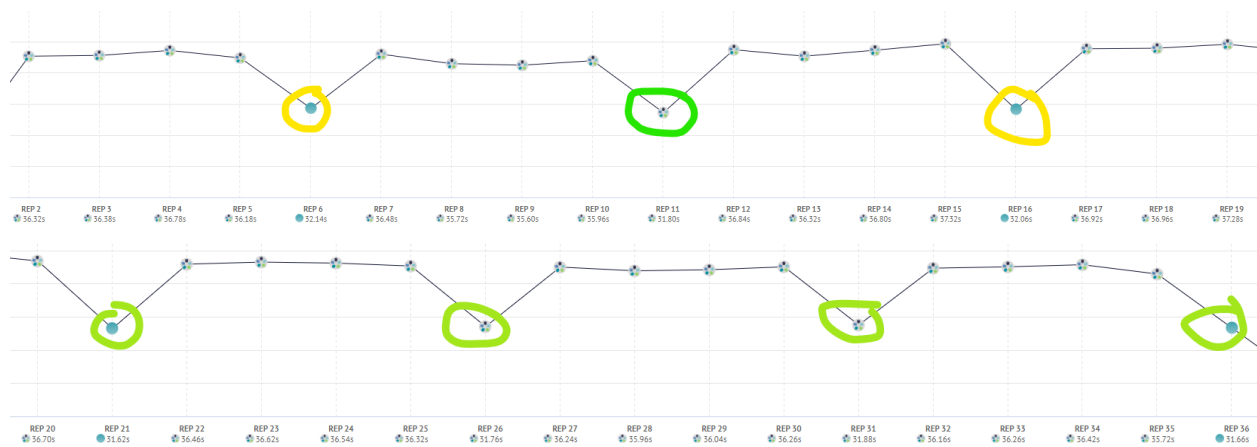


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This set was 35x50s @ 1.10, her objective was to swim 4 as Drill/Free, to keep her HR at a moderate level, and then SPRINT every 5th one, Breaststroke. The first 3 fast ones, she was 32 low and one 31 high, which is fair enough, but I recall telling her she was gliding into the wall on the 2nd 25, which is slow on it's own, but that it was because her pullout off the turn was weaker than the first pullout. She was 7 strokes fully on the first 25y, but 7 strokes with a small glide on the second 25.

She made that change on the 2nd half and went a string of four 31-mids in a row. Which is when I knew she could do it in a meet.



Splits

50 BREAST	28.72	28.72
100 BREAST	31.52	1:00.24
Heat Place 2		1:00.24



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