

Trending Today: Some Very Common Mistakes by Swimming Parents

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There are few *guarantees* in the sport of swimming. One of them is that **98%** of child prodigies in our sport will come to nothing as senior swimmers. (There is always an exception or two.)

This is because our age group sport is quite mature – a 60 plus year history now. And over time, all the athletes who set national age group records are (and said in the very kindest way) “genetic freaks.” They are what are known to coaches and developmental experts as early maturers or early developers. As such, they grow bigger, stronger, more coordinated, and in all athletic ways “better...earlier” than their more common young counterparts.

As a byword, the fact that your 12 year old has a five o'clock shadow does not mean that he's not still more interested in playing with toy trucks than girls. Physical development is notoriously out of synch with emotional and intellectual development.

One of the tragic aspects of our sport is that it's natural for the parent (who has seen one, two or three children, versus one, two or three THOUSAND children for the coach) to make the assumption that early success predicts an Olympian Future. Nothing could be further from the truth. The fact is, there are very, very, very, very few really unusual people physically. How many LeBron James's are in our population?

Which means that later on, that gawky, skinny, tiny 12-year old who appears to be ten, will catch up with your early maturing child, and if the normal pattern of growth asserts itself, will likely outgrow them later on, with a larger and larger stature, albeit later in life... when they are reaching THEIR physical maturity. The poor parent, wrongly assuming continual dominance, sometimes puts the poor early developer in the “rock and a hard place” problem by being disappointed that the child could not continue to dominate their competitors and assume some lack of effort, heart, or other “failing.” In point of fact there is often no failure at all, just Mother Nature reminding us that she RULES.

There is nothing worse for a youngster than being seen as a “has been” by their parents at age 14-18.

Thus the relative meaninglessness of Age Group Records, be their club records, LSC Records, or National Records. Not only do they NOT predict future success, they may impede it. Why? Because the strongest enemy of Great is Good.

When a child self-perceives themselves as “good,” they stop working on the technical aspects of the sport that they need to be superior. Hence we see prodigy children of 12-16, with fast times, and HORRENDOUS Strokes that will never physically hold together

when the child inevitably must increase their training volume in order to continue to improve.

The Technically proficient swimmer has no long term limits. The Technically deficient swimmer has nothing BUT limits.

Parents looking for more opportunities for their young swimmers to “break more records,” completely miss the point of long term development of athlete skill. The more chasing of records, the less time for technical and base development. One of the most true sayings in our sport is that **THINGS TAKE TIME**. Meaningful and lasting technical improvements require months (sometimes more) to “take hold.” First they must be learned mindfully, then they must be learned well enough to be practiced mindlessly, and finally, displayed under competitive pressure and stress. None of that happens in days or weeks.

Rushing from meet to meet with an emphasis on “getting faster now” retards or worse, eliminates the opportunity for real improvement. Worse, it implants a value system in the athlete’s mind that says, “Whatever will help me NOW is *most important*.” Not hard to see the tiny leap from that to a drugs-in-sport culture.

Finally, the internet is a wonderful thing. The Internet is an Awful Thing. Both are true.

The problem with the internet and over-zealous parents trying to learn more about swimming via the internet, is that you can find TONS of information. And information without context is tremendously dangerous. What the Olympic Champion Sprinter has to say about his training at age 28, IS NOT what is relevant or important for the 14-18 year old, much less the 10 year old athlete. In fact, it is completely destructive of what the young athlete should be doing to prepare for success at age 28 if they interested in still swimming at that age, at peak performance levels.

The New York Times a few months ago carried a great article about the dangers of internet information. They pointed out that a famous person said, “***There is nothing more precious than Freedom.***”

What American would argue with that?

Well, the Times went on to point out that the speaker was Vladimir Lenin, and his whole quote was “***There is nothing more precious than Freedom; it is so precious that the state must ration it out carefully, to no more than a few.***”

Be careful about the information you absorb from the internet.

All the Best,
John Leonard