

## **How Can You Help Your Swim Team**

By John Leonard- President of the American Swim Coaches Association-A.S.C.A.

The first question really should be, "Why should I help the Swim Team?" I'm going to work on that one first, because in the five years since I wrote the first edition of "Parent, Coach, and Athlete", I have come to realize that the answer for many people is not clear, as I thought it was at that time. In learning this, I have also come to be much more appreciative of the clubs that I have coached with, because the question never came up at either of them!

The simplest reason is also the most powerful. You should help because your child benefits greatly from the program. The second reason is that most clubs cannot function without substantial volunteer help. The economics are not there for a full professional staff to do all the things that need doing.

Look at the finances of swimming for a moment. Nobody likes to pay bills. Now count up the hours that are available for your child to participate in your swimming program. Divide your monthly fee by those hours, and you will come out with substantially less than you pay your baby sitter. And the baby sitter doesn't provide much in the way of a learning situation, values education, physical exercise and development, or role model. (Or at least, not many baby sitters do!)

Now imagine if you had to pay for all you get from swim team. Teams can't do it without your help. Add to that the fact that less than 15% of the clubs in the USA have full time swimming coaches, and less than 5% have more than one full time coach, and you can begin to recognize the need for parental involvement. Those clubs that do enjoy full time coaches are usually those of sufficient size that just coaching duties alone take up the whole day.

The club needs your help. Now let's get along to how you can provide that help. People have strange attitudes toward working with organizations. In most, a very few people do a tremendous amount of work that benefits everyone. This is especially true in swimming, which perhaps speaks to the quality of person that swimming attracts. There are parents who develop workaholic behavior towards swim teams. This is a bad deal for everyone. That person sooner or later burns out, leaving a big hole to fill. Meanwhile, that individual holds a great deal of power in the club, according to the rule that says, "He that does, decides." (That unwritten rule operates in all volunteer organizations, doesn't it?)

The club needs a little bit of time from everyone, a little more from some, and on occasion, a great deal from a few. Note that when you find your lawn uncut, the dishes three days deep in the sink, your cat starving on the porch, and you have just driven home from swim team leaving half the car pool at the swimming pool, you are over committed. This may also result in your child thinking that your club job is more important than they are.

The simple goal of most swimming organizations is to devise a system where the coach is left free to do what they do best....to coach. This means that parents take responsibility for fund raising, administration, club communication, and similar items.

Over the past five years there has been a trend to look at coaches more as a CEO (Chief Executive Officer) model, where they are involved in those things to the extent of making sure they are successful, but essentially the tasks are accomplished by parents. Having Coach involvement in those tasks is great, if they have time. If they don't, the idea is to use the volunteer talent available, in the areas where it can be most effectively deployed.

What kinds of jobs are available?

- **Fund raising...**bring in the dollars to make up the difference between operating budget and club fees. There has never been an organization with enough operating funds, and swimming is no exception. Most of us are experts at spending and less expert at "raising" money, so if you have any ability here, you'll be extremely popular at the club. (Of course, if you have that ability, you are already extremely popular...)

- **Publicity...**letting people know about the club, its goals, aims, results, and personal stories. A journalism background is helpful, but even more important is a willingness to organize results, type, and run them around town to local papers, TV and radio stations. It takes persistence, and the results are not automatically on display immediately.

- **Membership...**allied to publicity, helping the club attract and retain members. This can be really rewarding for new parents, as they learn much more quickly about the good things in swimming while working on this type of group. Learn to swim programs provide the bulk of new swimmers to teams, and you'll be a source of information to prospective swimming families.

- **Administration...**a general subheading for a vast array of jobs that include things like newsletters, meet entries, operating phone trees (to get news out quickly...usually about swimming, but sometimes gossip...that's a joke!) The amount of work required to operate a swim team is amazing, and most clubs like to have a system where one person performs a task while another learns it as an apprentice...and then takes it over later on. So, many jobs are "doubles".

- **Swim meets.** There are those who run meets as part of the fund raising efforts, and there are clubs who run meets strictly as opportunities for swimmers to compete, and there are some who do both. Even with electronic timing and computers, it takes 30 - 45 people a day to run a good swim meet. You'll be called on plenty, and your help is vital. This is one time that money will not substitute for your physical presence.

Lastly, remember that a parent organization in its best role, is a watchdog of philosophy...that same philosophy that you joined the team for. Stability is what builds the organization, and your support for that stability is the key thing you can contribute. I like the thought of "bloom where you are planted." As your child progresses in swimming, stay with your club, and help it progress. Involve yourself in helping to set goals and objectives and make it great! And remember, it is all for FUN, and all for your youngster.