

More on Playing Favorites

By Dan Kaster, Florida

Editors Note: One of the most requested reprint articles we provide, is an article by John Leonard on "Playing Favorites", originally in a 1989 ASCA Newsletter. The longevity of that viewpoint prompts us to print this article by Coach Dan Kaster, which expresses a similar view, from a different point of reference. Thanks Dan

Does Your Coach Play Favorites? Are you one of them?

In every classroom, every job, every team I've ever been on, I always seemed to notice the person in charge had favorites. I asked my mother one day if she did, her answer was "Of course not. All my children are my favorites. I just treat you individually." Years later she confided that she did have a special place in her heart for one of her children. I won't say which one. I have coached for many years now, at different levels, and I would like to address this sometimes blatant accusation of favorites. I would like to address the swimmer, the parent if you are a one who coaches a club team and the coach.

1. Swimmers, does your coach play favorites? Are you one of them? if so, have you ever stopped to ask yourself why? Are the favorites the better athletes? Are the favorites the "do-gooders"?

Ask yourself these questions:

- Are the favorites swimmers who....
- ...come to practice all the time?
- ...show a positive attitude all the time?
- ...do as the coach asks with no complaining?
- ...swim every yard in practice?
- ...support the team in everything?
- ...wear team apparel at every meet?
- ...practice courtesy to all team members?
- ...respect authority and knowledge?
- ...listen and support during team meetings?
- ...are the first in the water?
- ...are very conscientious?
- ...control their temper?
- ...never cheat?
- ...prioritize for team and training needs?
- ...do extra to make the team better?
- ...smile even when in a bad mood?
- ...show patience and understanding?
- ...act tough all the time?
- ...don't complain about hard work?
- ...take responsibility to lead and teach even when scorned by peers for doing so?
- ...constantly strive to maintain the coach's or your own high standards?

If you take a moment to look at these, anyone would agree that anyone doing all of this **should** be rewarded, and there is no more valuable

reward than the coach's time and attention. You should also note that being the "favorite" according to this list is no easy task. The easy way is to not be a favorite. But it is also obvious, according to this list, that anyone can be a favorite, and those who do the things on this list will certainly improve and this may be why they are the better swimmers. If you are a coach's favorite, based on this list or similar standards, I congratulate you! You've done the work. If you aren't a favorite, don't complain, they've got the tough job! Any conscientious coach finds something positive in all swimmers. If you are not showing the positive attributes that the coach wishes to reinforce, don't begrudge the people that do get rewarded. Most coaches will work with anyone who is willing to put in the work.

2. Coaches: The above list is self-explanatory. If you have favorites and are basing that on objective standards that can be met by everyone, great! Hopefully you can produce an atmosphere where everyone will want to be a favorite. Just remember; while you want to reward positive behavior and attitudes, every athlete needs a little help now and then. Also keep in mind that you cannot reach every athlete. Sometimes you just have to teach and prepare them the best you can and wish them well when they leave. Be prepared not to get credit for your work and to get blamed for anything negative. It goes with the job. Enjoy your "favorites" even if they are not better swimmers. Take joy in differences and have patience with everyone, but never lower your standards.

3. If you are an athlete's parent reading this, take this for what it is worth. Every parent is out for the well being of his or her own child. You are the child's number one fan. This is how it should be. Understand that the coach has a different focus and things may seem different from his view. Rather than see the coach has favorites and complain, try to look objectively and see if his favorites fit the criteria. If your child is one of those that meet the criteria, great! If your child is not, encourage the child to do so, and model the standards for him. Please remember that the child learns opinions and perceptions from those around him. If his parents are negative, the child will eventually be negative. If peers or teammates are negative, the child will have to risk rejection of his peers to meet the criteria. Not every child will take that risk. Also, remember each child has his own gifts and will excel in his own thing in his own time if everything goes right. Work with the coach in setting high standards, support the coach, and encourage the child to achieve the highest level he can. ■

Tip of the Month for Novice Coaches April

Coaching is goal direction! Make certain that every time you send a swimmer to the blocks to swim, that they have just one goal to attain. Make sure you and that swimmer agree on what that goal will be.

Goals can be anything; a time, a stroke correction, a start or turn improvement, a pacing strategy, and many other options, including... Winning the Race! But make sure that each competitive swim has just one goal.

When the athlete returns to you to discuss the race after he's swum it, analyze it simply in terms of the success level of the goal you were seeking. If they did something else well, mention it if you like, but dwell and spend time on what you both agreed to do. Help the athlete understand that his swimming is a partnership with his coach.

Try hard not to overcoach. It's easy to do as a young and eager coach. Keep instructions simple, and evaluate only on those instructions; don't play "mix and match."

Bonus tip: Hang around experienced coaches at swim meets and listen to how they talk to their own athletes. (ask the coach if you can do this first!) Many famous coaches did this as they were coming up in their career, to learn from the best, how to speak with their athletes.

NOTICE

ASCA wants photographs of your swimmers to include in issues of *American Swimming*. Please send any pictures to:
The American Swimming Coaches Association
2101 North Andrews Avenue
Suite 107
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33311