**IT'S YOUR SPORT, LOVE IT OR LEAVE IT**

I was talking to a collegiate athlete the other day who had been swimming since she was nine years old. One of the fastest swimmers on her team, jenny had a full ride to a D - I program. She was going into her junior year and from the outside looking in, seemed to have the world by the tail. She already held a number of school records, was All Conference and a major point scorer during Championships. There was of course the slight problem of her slump over the past several months and the minor fact that she spent so much time crying after practices. Perhaps this was related to that ugly little secret that Jenny had kept hidden all these years: She hated swimming! Maybe it was the fact that her father had pushed her too hard for too long. His obvious disappointment and anger whenever she did poorly certainly didn't help. The guilt trips he put on her whenever she wanted to take time off also took a toll. His sticking her nose into her training and those long conversations he'd have with her coach both annoyed and embarrassed her. Regardless of the reasons, Jenny hadn't really enjoyed being in the pool since her very first year.

Back then she absolutely loved the sport. She loved being with her friends, loved the hard work and looked forward to the challenge. Meets were great fun and she loved to compete. Unfortunately all that changed the instant her father figured out that she had some talent for the sport. So all these years Jenny swam to keep her father happy. She swam not to disappoint him. She swam to get the coach to like her. She swam because she was good at it and so she wouldn't let other people down. In sum, Jenny swam for all the WRONG reasons! Jenny didn't really have any goals of her own. It seemed that all "her" goals really belonged to her father or coach. How about you? Do you know why you're swimming? Do you have dreams of going far in this sport? Do you have big, far away goals that you want to achieve? Or, like Jenny, have you lost your direction and aren't quite sure why you get into the pool every day? Are you swimming for yourself or just to keep other people happy?

Keep this in mind if you have any desire to reach your potential in this or any other sport. Without love and passion for what you're doing, you'll never, NEVER be successful! If you don't love what you're doing it will be impossible for you to maintain the drive and motivation necessary to achieve swimming excellence. Your love of the sport keeps you going through all those hard practices. It motivates you to get right back up after a disappointing loss or setback. Your passion for swimming will help you ward off burn-out and survive the frustration of extended slumps or plateaus. If you love what you're doing you'll get more out of each and every practice. Passion and success go hand in hand.

When I talk with swim teams I'm always telling the athletes, "If you want to go fast, you have to HAVE FUN!" You have to enjoy the process. You have to love the pain and fatigue. You have to love the challenge and competition. The heart of all this love is knowing who you are swimming for. You can't have this love and passion without swimming for YOU. Just about every Olympian I've talked to over the years has this passion and knows that they are swimming for them themselves, not for their coaches or parents. These Olympic swimmers all report having parents who were smart enough to know that the sport belongs to the swimmer, not the parent. To love what you're doing and be successful in the pool you must have total ownership of your swimming. Whether you love going fast, the challenge, the quest to be #1, the competition, the hard work, the socializing or a combination of some or all of these doesn't matter. What does matter is that you swim for yourself, and because you like the sport. You'll never burn out or become a drop-out statistic if you keep that love and passion with you whenever you train and compete.