

News For SWIM PARENTS

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A New Generation of Second Best Swimmers?

Are we going too far with the popular idea that competitiveness and winning for all age group swimmers should be de-emphasized while fun and maximum participation should be emphasized?

In any conversation about age group swimming it's nice to say that the two most important things about age group swimming are 1): the opportunity for children to participate in a healthy activity and, 2): the chance for children to try to do their best. We tell children, "Winning means doing your best. If you achieve a first place, that's a bonus!"

There was a time when adults paid lip service to the above notion while at the same time seeking out and encouraging first place swimmers of all ages. However, in the past couple of years we have seen more than just lip service being paid to the ideals of age group swimming. There are serious and highly supported moves to de-emphasize age group swimming. Eliminating competition for 8 and unders and eliminating national rankings for 9 & 10's are two of the current thoughts. Participation and fun are the popular key words while winning and aggressiveness are words spoken less frequently.

If we're not careful we will be chagrined to find that we have produced a generation of swimmers who are second best and feel it is completely ok to be second best -- so long as they tried.

One US swimmer, a world record holder who had just lost the gold medal at the Olympics (or should I say "won a silver medal"?), said he was happy with his performance. He pointed out that a year ago nobody, including himself, would have expected him to make the Olympic team, let alone win a silver medal. Many people applauded his modest and grateful attitude. However, there was another message being broadcast to thousands of young athletes -- that it is ok to be second best.

Those who harbor a second best attitude will invariably be second best. For those with the ability, interest, desire, and aggressiveness to be the best we should promote, not discourage, a first best attitude. It is important for coaches to look for that sparkle in a young swimmer's eye that says "I want to be the best" and then promote and encourage that attitude.

Certainly we should not promote competitive aggressiveness and winning with all children but then we should not hold back those who have the drive and the ability to be the best. There needs to be room for all kinds of children in our swimming programs. Let's not make second best clones of everyone