

News For SWIM PARENTS

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When The Coach Goes To Nationals

Concern: The coach leaves the team for a whole week just to take one swimmer to nationals. It is not fair to the team and a poor use of money.

Response: It is an important milestone in the development of the swimmer, of the coach, and of the team when the first junior national qualifier is developed. This swimmer represents the current "peak" of the program. All parts of a program are important but the peak is of special importance because it is a point that all younger developing athletes can look forward to and work towards. It provides direction in the program.

It is difficult for newer swim parents, especially parents of young age group swimmers, to understand the importance of sending the coach away to nationals at great expense and while all the other swimmers on the team stay at home without their head coach. The situation is sometimes made worse by the fact that local junior Olympic meets are held at about the same time as nationals.

What are the choices and what are the consequences?

1. Swimmer attends nationals without coach. This is not fair to the athlete or to the coach. The athlete has worked for and deserves the attention and professional guidance of the coach. The coach also deserves the reward of developing such a fine athlete by being involved in the national experience. Attending nationals is also a very important educational experience for the coach. By not sending the coach to nationals with the swimmer the club is also sending a message to the athletes that the club is not interested in elite athletes.
2. Swimmer and coach stay home. This cuts the peak of the program and removes incentives for athletes and coach to become the best they can be. It is the mark of a team that does not include growth as part of it's long range goals, or perhaps does not have any goals at all. It is a program that will always have young and relatively inexperienced coaches because few coaches will be satisfied working in a situation where they cannot grow.
3. Swimmer and coach attend nationals with the support and good will of the entire club. This is the mark of a program that looks to the future, believes in growth, and believes in rewarding the good work by both the athlete and the coach.

When the coach and athlete attend nationals it is a celebration of team success. The athlete can return home as the hero and "tell the story" of nationals that will inspire the rest of the team. Short sighted and self serving age group parents work for the best interest of their children today. Unfortunately they fail to realize that someday it is their child that will qualify for nationals. Parents must look at the larger picture. When the coach goes to nationals it is not just for one swimmer, it is for the whole team. The coach also returns home as the hero and can teach the whole team about the experience.

What then of the younger swimmers who have workouts and possibly a meet to attend while the coach is at nationals? It is the responsibility of the Board of Directors and coach to 1) educate the families as to the needs of the whole program, and 2) prepare assistant coaches and swimmers for the opportunity to be their best during this time. These things should not be thought of two weeks before nationals, but should be part of each seasonal plan.

Parents also should remember that a good coach who is developing junior national swimmers this season will soon be developing senior national swimmers as well. The club will need to be prepared to send the coach to two national meets each season.

Concern: The coach is taking swimmers that haven't been part of the team to senior nationals while our younger year- round swimmers are left at home with assistant coaches.

Response: Are these athletes high school or college swimmers who have participated on the team, perhaps even developed on the team, but have simply been away to participate on their school teams? It is an HONOR to have them return home to represent their home team! It shows that they have loyalty for the club and respect for your good coach. It shows that your club appreciates and welcomes home it's athletes.

If these are athletes that have not at any time been part of the team and now wish to represent the team at nationals it is a tribute to your excellent program and outstanding coach that they should want to represent your team. Upon returning home from nationals these athletes should also contribute to the team's education about the national experience by sharing the story with the younger athletes.

There are financial considerations that the coach and Board of Directors need to address concerning travel costs and reimbursements. A coaches costs should be part of the club's regular travel budget and not linked to the number of swimmers, or the type of swimmers (college or high school) attending nationals. Partial reimbursements to athletes is a separate matter for discussion.

THE LARGER PICTURE

The preceding article has a greater significance than deciding who goes to nationals. It asks the parent to look at the larger picture of club, athlete, and coach development. One of the most important tasks of the age group parent is to ask "what can I do to ensure the continued development of my child AND the program?"

1. Invest in an ASCA certified professional swim coach. Invest means to provide the security, compensation, and authority a coach needs to develop your club to it's greatest potential.
2. Promote and participate in a values/mission statement/central theme process with the coach and Board of Directors that results in LONG RANGE PLANNING.