

News For

SWIM PARENTS

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When a Child Starts on The Swim Team as a Teenager

“My 13 Year Old Son Has Just Started Swimming Competitively. What Are His Chances Of Succeeding Having Begun At Relatively Late Age For A Swimmer?”

Answered by: George Block, Aquatic Director of the Northside Independent School District, San Antonio, Texas.

The word “chance” reflects the disparity between possibility and probability. There is a long history of late beginning male swimmers doing very well, from George Breen to Rowdy Gaines, but the “possibility” doesn’t matter. We’re talking about your son.

First of all, he has to have a certain a basic physical abilities. Can he float with his lungs inflated? Can he streamline and glide when he pushed off the wall? Does he have normal strength and flexibility? Is he in good health?

You also have to find if he has some basic psychological abilities. Is he attentive? Is he a good listener? Does he follow instructions well? Will he persevere?

A little higher up the ladder, I would consider his athletic background, his extracurricular activities and his academic performance.

After this evaluation, the parent needs to work very closely with the child’s coach. The coach can tell you if your son has “talent”. Does he have the “feel” of the water? Does he learn quickly?

Finally, you must look at the team and the environment. Are swimmers performing well on the local level? The state level? Are they doing well at the Junior Nationals? Senior Nationals?

None of those things can explain the short, uncoordinated kids who try out as freshmen in high school and go on to become superstars in college. That is explained by perseverance. Coaches see perseverance beat talent everyday. Perseverance in its most tangible form is “being there” is what changes the odds from possible to probable.

In swimmers who take up the sport “late”, the effects of training are always more “acute” (short term) than “chronic” (long term). Since your son won’t have the chronic training history of some of his teammates, he will need to train more effectively, have better attendance, and learn more from each competition than they do.

This may seem like a full order, but actually it’s great opportunity. In the long haul, the “process” is more important than “the product”. If your son decides to commit himself to excellence in competitive swimming, he will have taken a major step out of the crowd that seeks only mediocrity. He will be one of the few “committed” in an age of “dilettantes”. He will have to site, plan, organize and work for long term goals. He will have to arrange for the cooperation of those around him; parents, siblings, coaches, teammates, teachers, and friends. He will also have to measure his own success. Yes, your son can be successful, and, yes it will be difficult...but that is what makes it worth doing.