

News For SWIM PARENTS

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Who Should The Head Coach Work With?

Concern: Our full time head coach rarely works with the age group swimmers or attends age group meets. The club pays him a good salary to be our "HEAD" coach, he should work with all the swimmers.

Response: This is an important concern and one that must be resolved with the Board of Directors and the coach as soon as possible. It is not a matter that should be circulated among and speculated upon by the whole membership because it too often leads to misunderstandings based on lack of knowledge and things can be said or actions taken that hurt the whole program. The Board of Directors should consider the following points:

1. In the first place, the head coach is ultimately responsible for coaching all the age group swimmers. The head coach makes long range plans that include your age group swimmer, supervises and trains assistant coaches, and cares very much for the welfare and progress of every age group swimmer. So in a very real sense, the head coach IS coaching your child.

2. A child's swimming development must include a steady flow of NEW experiences and skills to learn. We do not believe an age group swimmer should have "everything". When we give them everything we have, we take away the opportunity for them to discover new things along the way. When we give them everything today, including the head coach, tomorrow becomes boring.

Age group swimmers love the occasional attention given by the head coach and they cherish every word of good humor and advice the head coach gives. They "can't wait" for the day when they join the senior team. This is a very great and positive motivation for young swimmers that helps them stay with a program and look forward to the future.

3. Think about practices. Coaching senior swimmers and coaching age group swimmers requires a completely different approach and therefore completely different planning. It requires an attitude change to move from coaching senior swimmers to age group swimmers. One coach described it as "needing a different brain" to coach each group. It is important, therefore, in moderate to large clubs where resources allow the hiring of age group coaches, to place them in charge of age group groups.

Qualified age group coaches who target their efforts toward the coaching of age group swimmers can do a better job than the head coach can in situations when the head coach is required to do both.

In order to assure confidence in age group coaches by the membership it is important that age group coaches are thoroughly trained by the head coach, that they are members of ASCA and certified, and that the Board of Directors financially supports coaching educational expenses.

4. Think about swim meets. We know a coach who, when first starting out with a club and had not yet fully developed a good assistant coach, went to age group "A", age group "B", age group "C" and/or senior meets on 13 weekends in a row -- both sessions, both days. Place yourself in the shoes of the coach. You have a family and you have a life outside of the natatorium. So does the coach and a coach needs time away from work. Age group coaches can handle the age group team at meets while the head coach receives well deserved time off.

5. One might think that a coach in a small club would need to work with all the swimmers but the coach of a larger club, where there are assistants available, could concentrate on the senior and national swimmers. In reality, we know of small clubs where the head coach only works with a select few of the top senior and national swimmers, and we know of one very large, nationally prominent club with a large staff, where the head coach was let go because he did not work with the age group swimmers.

The point is, there is no single and simple answer for this problem that all programs will accept. Each program establishes its own philosophy based upon its resources and upon the needs and desires of the membership.

6. Needs and desires are different. in a small club with limited resources and staff the head coach NEEDS to work with as many of the athletes as is reasonable. Most good coaches want to do this anyway, as they recognize it is the best way to build the club.

In a large club, the need for the head coach to work with all the swimmers is not so great but the DESIRE of the membership to have the coach work with all the swimmers may be. It is important to understand that this DESIRE is not a reasonable request upon the coach, especially where resources provide for the hiring of an assistant coach.