COACHING SWIMMERS WITH DISABILITIES

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BRIEF HISTORY OF HOW I GOT INVOLVED
MEMBER OF THE USA NATIONAL TEAM UNTIL 2004
ON FEBRUARY 6\textsuperscript{TH}, 2005 I BROKE MY BACK SLEDDING
STARTED SWIMMING AGAIN TO GET OUT OF MY WHEELCHAIR
JIMI FLOWERS CONTACTED ME ABOUT COMPETING AGAIN
I HAD SEVERAL MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE PARALYMPICS

- No one competes for hugs
- “Inspirational” and “Special” are dirty words
- Competition is extremely intense
EARNED A PLACE ON THE USA PARALYMPIC TEAM AND COMPETED IN BEIJING!
JULY 10, 2009 JIMI FLOWERS DIES FROM CLIMBING ACCIDENT
I APPLY FOR RESIDENT COACHING POSITION AND TAKE OVER WHERE JIMI LEFT OFF
GETTING STARTED WITH A NEW ATHLETE

• Learn everything you can about the athlete AND their disability
• Parents are NOT always the best resource
• Dive in!!!
TRY EVERYTHING YOU CAN AS IF THEY WERE JUST ANOTHER SWIMMER

• Then adapt for the disability
FOCUS ON ATHLETICISM AND THE PERSON

- NOT the disability
- Try dryland exercises to develop athleticism in the water before they dry off and try them on land
WRITE WORKOUTS AS YOU USUALLY WOULD, THEN MODIFY

- Adjust intervals
- Adjust distance
- Similar exercise at same distance or speed (piston kick instead of scull)
- Add equipment
- With the right modifications a disabled swimmer will not hold the rest of the team back
SEVERELY DISABLED ATHLETES WILL NEED MORE ONE-ON-ONE TRAINING AND COACHING

• Make the time to make a difference
• Very challenging, but equally rewarding
• Make sure they are involved with the team
• Avoid clapping when they finish a race
• Focus on steady improvement
• Allow them to help outside of the pool
MAKING ADAPTATIONS WITH EQUIPMENT

• Adaptive equipment cannot be used during Paralympic competition but can help in training
VARIOUS SIZES OF FINS CAN LEVEL THE PRACTICE FIELD
SHINFINS WORK WELL FOR LEG AMPUTEES
PADDLES OF DIFFERENT SHAPES AND SIZES CAN BALANCE A SWIMMERS DEVELOPMENT
FOR SPINAL CORD INJURIES OR LIMITED LEG MOBILITY
STRAPPED IN BUOYS MAKE A HUGE DIFFERENCE
BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED ATHLETES CAN USE A TEMPO TRAINER SET AT 10, 15, OR 30 SECONDS TO LEAVE ON AN INTERVAL
COMPLETELY BLIND SWIMMERS ARE TAPPED AT THE WALL DURING COMPETITION WITH A “TAPPER”
JIMI FLOWERS AND JULIE O’NEILL DESIGNED A SIMPLE PUMP AND SPRINKLER SYSTEM FOR BLIND SWIMMERS TO BE SET UP AT EACH WALL FOR TURNS DURING PRACTICE
WHEN ADAPTING FOR YOUR SWIMMER: GET CREATIVE

- Remember, there’s no convention to follow
- The only time you are doing it wrong is when you aren’t doing anything at all
ATHLETES WITH THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS ARE ELIGIBLE FOR CLASSIFICATION AND COMPETITION IN PARALYMPIC (IPC) APPROVED EVENTS

• Amputees
• Dwarfism
• Visual Impairment/Blindness
• Spinal Cord Injuries
• Traumatic Brain Injury
• Stroke
• Cerebral Palsy
• Intellectual Impairments
• Various birth defects that affect movement or mobility
A LITTLE MORE ABOUT THE PARALYMPIC GAMES

• Paralympic Swimming covers every disability
• Swimming events take place over ten days
• Athletes compete based on a classification system, not necessarily the same disability
• There are 10 physical impairment classes S1-S10 (the lower the number the more severe the disability)
• There are 3 classes for visual impairment S11-S13
• There is one class for intellectual impairment S14
• Classifications are done at Paralympic competitions by impartial classifiers (IPC Approved)
• If you have an athlete that would like to be classified for Paralympic competition contact Erin Popovich at erin.popovich@usoc.org
JUST LIKE THE OLYMPICS, THE PARALYMPICS ARE THE ELITE GAMES FOR THE BEST ATHLETES IN THE WORLD.
COACHING CONNECTION JUST LAUNCHED

- Coaches with interest in coaching disabled athletes at any level or Paralympic hopefuls can come out to the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs and shadow the Resident Program for up to six days.
- You are responsible for travel, U.S. Paralympics will cover your room and board.
- Selection is based off of time availability as well as USOC approval.
- Share ideas with the resident coach and learn to work with multiple abilities.
- Applications will be posted on the U.S. Paralympics website this month under “Coaching Connection.”
- If you have more interest please feel free to contact Dave Denniston at any time.
- [Dave.Denniston@usoc.org](mailto:Dave.Denniston@usoc.org)
GETTING INVOLVED!

- Various competitions for any athlete of any ability at any age can be found at USParalympics.org under the swimming section
- We are always looking to add good coaches to the U.S. Paralympics Swimming trip list!
- Contact Queenie Nichols (High Performance Director) at queenie.nichols@usoc.org
- Contact me at dave.denniston@usoc.org
QUESTIONS?