Pre-Team Spotlight USA Swimming Webinar: The FISH "Bridge Programs"

Presented by Coach Jo Podlasek Vera
Mini- FISH Coach
The Fish Swim Team

- Located in McLean, Virginia (Washington DC Metro Area)
- Head Coach/ Executive Director Ray Benecki
- Example of Excellence since 1991
- World Records, American Records, Olympians, National Age Group Records
- Bronze Medal (2012); Gold Medal (2009) recognition
- 325 Swimmers in 2 main sites

About Jo Vera:
Jo has been teaching swimming in the McLean area for over 12 years. With a specialty in developmental swimming, she is eager to share her love and passion for the sport. Currently, Jo is the program director for the Seasonal Swim Clinics at Regency Sport and Health Club, an 8 & under coach for the Fish USA Swimming Club, and co-founder of Tsunami Masters.

Jo is a competitor herself. Most recently, she completed the Sharkfest: Alcatraz Swim open water swim and medaled at the 2014 USMS Summer Nationals Championships. Jo is also a community volunteer, an ultra-runner and practices Brazilian Jiu Jitsu.
Many Models... One Goal

- There is more than one model to follow for Bridge Programs. This is what works for us.
- A bad coach is one that refuses to be a student.
Overview

Generally Speaking

- What is a Bridge Program and what purpose does it serve in the Swimming Community
- What considerations should you make when choosing a Model to follow

Our Model

- How is it unique
- A Brief History and Some Statistics
- Goals
- Basic Model and Growing Pains
- Advantages
- Challenges
- Future Goals
A Bridge Program is an established program that creates a way for swimmers and families to transition successfully to a USA Swimming Club.
What Purpose Does a Bridge Program Serve in the Outside Community

- Showcases the power of USA Swimming Coaches to the outside swimming community
- Creates a path from learn-to-swim to the sport of swimming: activity → sport
  #FunnestSportEver
- Raises children’s and families’ swim IQ
  - Highlights our sport, one in which elementary aged children can safely participate
What Purpose Does a Bridge Program Serve in the Club Community

- Excellent recruiting tool
- Successfully prepares team members
- Revenue generator
  - Creates more placement opportunities
  - Retention tool (seasonal and additional practice)
- Creates more professional coaching positions
- Staff training tool
- Transition to new sites
What Considerations Should You Make When Choosing Your Model

- CREATING GOALS- we can never get there if we do not know where we are going!
- What do you want your Bridge Program to do for your Team?
- What Ages and Levels of Swimmers are you Targeting?
- Merging anyone?
What Considerations Should You Make When Choosing Your Model

- A Business Plan and Written Model is Key
  - Ever evolving and room to grow
  - Plan A to Z
- Staff- Consider Dedicated Staff
- Site
  - Benefits/ Limitations
- Marketing
- Management
  - Technology
Our Model

- Original Model: A Marketing Tool in the ‘Off Season’
  - Seasonal Site Clinics
    - Utilize Pool Space
    - Still Current- serves purpose for general market

- Current Model: Privatized Approach
  - Privatized Configuration
    - Site and Lane Space Limitation
    - Much Broader Audience
    - Meet More Goals
How Did We Arrive at Our Current Model: A Brief History

- In 2010: Void in the Market Identified
- Even with experienced private instructors, still failures in transition to team
  - “My Pool; My Space; My Curriculum; MY COACH”
- Studied what was currently offered in the area
  - Conditioning programs
  - Group lessons
- In 2010, teamed up with the FISH Mini’s Head Coach and created the Seasonal Swim Clinics which launched in January 2011 at Regency Sport and Health Club
How Did We Arrive at Our Current Model: Fill the Void

- Ratios!
- Quality of the Product
- Quality of Instruction (Professional Staff)
- Consistency
- Our Current Clinics are Built off of the FISH Mission of Excellence
  - Be Safe; Have Fun; Learn Something
  - Hands on, Dedicated Coaches
  - Foundations in Technique and Efficiency for Longevity
  - Progressions: Only Forwards, Never Backwards

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Our Goals

- We not only want to feed our club, but create educated, quality swimmers that will be successful when transitioning to our team.
- Offer an option for swimmers that are not ‘ready’ for a USA Swimming Program
  - Commitment; Not Competitors; Fitness Swimmers; Additional Practice Option; Seasonal Enrichment
- First Strong Foundation of Technique, Then Racing Strategies, Then Conditioning
Our Model

- 8 week Seasonal Cycles offered four times per year; 1 time/week
- Shallow Water (Lanes)
- 3 Levels Based on Ability
  - Beginner (5+)
  - Intermediate (7-10)
  - Advanced (10+)
- Assessment Required

- Ratio of 6:1
- Coaches in the Water
- Dedicated Professional Staff
  - Additional Staff
- Practice based on Progressions
- Consistency and Product Recognition
- Consistency in Information

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When We Launched

- Started January 2011
- Offered 3 Levels two days per week (one weekday and one weekend day)
- Goal to define success
- 36 Swimmers
- 2 Coaches
- Only our client base to pull from
# Seasonal Swim Clinics

- **Winter**: January to March
- **Spring**: March to May
- **Summer**: June to July
- **Fall**: October to December

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Where We Are Currently

- 2014 Winter Session: 135 Swimmers (over 300% inc.)
- 3 Days - 3 Levels Offered
- 1 Program Director: 3 Dedicated Lane Coaches
  - 3 Additional Coaches
- Fall Session (October 2014): 70% Full with a waitlist for some classes
- Creating a Business Plan to expand to other sites

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Evolution of the Program

- Who coaches the program (the quality of the product cannot be compromised)
- Always have trained professional coaches
- Have practice written for the program
- Name what your focus is:
  - For us, it is technique, then racing strategies and conditioning
- Can be consistent and dynamic
- Viewed now as a school year program, can identify separate goals for each season
Advantages of This Model

- Privatized Approach allows for the program to be more dynamic
- You can utilize undesirable sites
  - Water Temperature
- 8 week structure allows trial sites
- Swimmers can ‘move up the ranks’ faster (emotional motivation)
- Head start on drills, progressions and common language of the team- established ‘good practice habits’
- Train the trainer
Advantages of This Model

- Accommodate Schedules
- Accommodate Friend requests
- Siblings practice at the same time or back to back
- Manage expectations
- Behavior conditioning
- Leave them wanting more- always room to improve
Challenges of Our Model

- Must Have Shallow Water
- Getting wet is required; trained professionals are a necessity
- Current design is for the Grade School and under demographic
- No Diving
- Disconnect of volunteering and fundraising efforts required at club level
- No competition opportunities
Future Goals

- Open More Sites
  - Implementation Plan/ Site Managers
- Create a program for additional populations
  - Gateway curriculums
    - Toddler Safety/Learn to Swim
  - High School Conditioning Prep
  - Masters Bridge Program
- Create opportunities for ‘fun meets’ that are fundraisers
Questions

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