

DEVELOPMENTAL TRAINING OF ATHLETES FOR LONG TERM COMPETITIVE SUCCESS

Ron Forrest
Head Coach – Fort Worth Area Swim Team
Fort Worth, Texas

Talent Assessment

- Try to have a coaching staff that “see” talent and can identify it.
- Understand that a “lazy” swimmer may be a bored elite world class athlete waiting to happen.
- TALK to the swimmer. See how a swimmer reacts to speaking to a Head Coach
- “Mature” for their age?
- Physical Traits – Clumsy may be a good thing!

Planning

- Goal Setting – Crucial.
- Calendar Planning – Both Short Term and Long Term. Give them a reason as to “why” they are doing something not just “what”.
- “TEAM” Endeavor – Parents Critical to this “Adventure”/ Team component behind top swimmers.
- Plan for good and bad times. There WILL be both – guaranteed.
- BE FLEXIBLE! Be willing to throw it all out!

What is “Your” Focus

- Your Focus or Theirs (It MUST be theirs)
- Big Picture Vs. Little Pond
- Specific Times and Places – give the athlete something to “see” down the road. Don't drive blind. Have a road map.
- Does the focus change? That's OK.
- REMEMBER – BE FLEXIBLE when its needed.

Training (pg. 1)

- Understand that once they start to reach advanced level you are dealing with a thoroughbred much the same as a race horse (we can really learn from horse racing as a sport) – they can be skittish.
- Probably highly self-motivated – Understand that.
- Know when to “crack the whip” and know when to “let it go”.
- Boredom could be your worst enemy

Training (pg.2)

- NOT all training sessions can be National/Olympic caliber.
- Most elites will crave variety and to ensure a multi year, or multi decade career at a very elite level. Make sure that you are looking into different ways where the appropriate athletic preparation is done – but maybe in ways that are a little different and heaven forbid.....FUN!

Training (pg.3)

- Test Sets and Performance Feedback in Training and Competition will help to keep interest in what is going on. This type of feedback is necessary as the elite athlete will want to know. Use specifics. Not generalities.
- We all do “it” after bad swims. Make sure to do it after “Great” swims too. Take time for feedback – even if celebrating.
- “STEAL EVERYTHING THAT WORKS”
(Quote stolen directly from David Salo – circa 1995)

Training (pg. 4)

- Know the physical limits of your athletes – they DO have them. It is OK to push them to these limits but know when it's going to the well 1 too many times.
- DON'T be afraid to involve others to help – showing a need for others to be involved will not diminish you in an athlete's eyes – it may enhance it.
- Try to keep things as a “team” in training.

Competitions

- Pressure – Both Athlete and Coach will experience it and need to manage it during certain situations.
- “Big Meets” – ordeal or is some FUN allowed?
- I firmly believe that a lot of long term careers are shortened because coaches and people around an athlete don't manage point 1 and then forget or neglect point 2. At the end of the day – it still needs to be FUN! At ANY age.
- “Little Things”. Try to notice – react to feedback

Misc.

- Know when a Season is over (don't grasp)
- LISTEN to your athlete when they want to be heard.
- On the social side – treat developing great athletes the same as their peers. Being “different” (even when different is exceptional) can be tough. They want to be normal too.
- Check your ego at the door. It's not about you.
- What does “Long Term” mean?
- Have your realistic “End Game” planned and come to terms with it sooner than later.

The End.....?

- “Long-term” usually means a career spanned in years. The chances of one coach spending that time with an athlete is unrealistic.
- It's OK to say goodbye! VALUE your long term relationship with an athlete with whom you had to probably had to go through an amazing journey with. But it's time for them to move to the next phase of trip.
- Understand holding on too tight is counterproductive to EVERYTHING and can lead to long term failure if athlete held in situation that turns counterproductive.
- Rather – Be excited to see them go – and enjoy your new role as (from time to time only) “Opinion Giver” or even more “Fun” as getting to sit back and be a FAN.
- I am proud of the long term relationships I have with former athletes, both active and retired because I learned this lesson!

What Did I Do Right (More Importantly – What Did I Do WRONG)?

- You WILL make mistakes if you are preparing an athlete for a long term career. It happens.
- Question is – do you make the same mistakes over and over again.
- Can you recognize the mistakes?
- Are you flexible enough to vary what you did “right” for future athletes?
- Remember the Ego thing...quietly be honestly critical of yourself to improve.