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After Your Child Swims the Event

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Long Time Age Group Coach

What's the proper process immediately following the conclusion of the swimmer's event? In this article I am going to talk about the age group swimmer who does not have the same immediate physical need to warm down as a senior swimmer does.

Many coaches want to be the first person to speak with the young swimmer immediately after their event is swum. Why? First, the longer the time between finishing the event and receiving constructive comments, the less the swimmer is going to remember about the swim. Being lead away by a loving and well meaning parent for treats or hugs or high fives from Grandpa, lessen the opportunity for immediate feedback from the coach.

Secondly, the coach has critical commentary on the quality of the swim which is vital for the learning process and needs to be the first person to review the swim with the swimmer. If the swimmer hears either overflowing positives, or in some cases, harsh criticism from the parents before he or she visits with the coach it is very possible the swimmer is going to be receiving conflicting messages.

After an event I first ask my swimmers, "How did you like your swim?" I want to hear their feelings first. In some situations, when a swimmer displays excessive anger or crying after a swim I will ask them to warm down first, or to sit quietly in private for a few moments before talking about the swim. In these cases I am wanting them to learn how to manage their feelings and I prefer they not visit with Mom or Dad yet.

After listening to them I proceed to analyze the swim in three basic areas. Was it a best time? A best time is not the only issue but it is important. I make a pretty big deal about best times and I want the swimmers to recognize the importance of always trying for best times. However, I also look at how they swam the race – was it technically correct with proper pace and a good start, good turns, good stroke mechanics and a good finish? Sometimes a best time is tempered by the fact that the swim wasn't really a "best swim." I also look at the race. "Winning the race" refers to beating whoever they are close to in the heat. Sometimes it means winning the heat, sometimes it means winning the event, sometimes it means out touching the swimmer in the next lane for seventh place. The sport is a competitive sport and the ability to race is important. If a swimmer is successful at one of the three objectives I tell them they did a good job. If they are successful at two of the three, that's a better job. If they are successful at all three, then they did the best they are capable of at that point in time. I avoid using words like "unbelievable" or "great" preferring to leave them with a sense that they can always improve.

How can the parent respond? First, if the child forgets to go directly to the coach, please give them a quick hug and sent them straight to the coach. Afterwards, I think the most important thing is to simply love your child and provide emotional comfort. Congratulate them. Console them. Ask them how they felt about their swim before you tell them anything. Ask them what the coach said. But please, don't add a technical critique, leaving that for the coach.

There is no doubt that a healthy parent-coach-athlete relationship is vital to the long term success of the athlete. Stay in touch with the coach, support him or her, and direct your children to the right places at the right times.