

Attendance at Swimming Practice

By John Leonard

One of the hallmarks of a quality swimming team program is a planned program of physical development.

(Other hallmarks include an emphasis on teaching, intelligent approaches to competition, and racing with a purpose, as well as individual attention to those who are "earning it" through their attention to the instructions of the coach.)

The planned program of physical development includes programmed physical stress and recovery times. Progress can only be made by the athlete by imposing a previously unexperienced stress on the body system. The body will then adapt to this stress, if provided the appropriate degree and timing of recovery. (Total rest is NOT appropriate recovery...it does not provide the lower level stimulation necessary for compensatory chemical reactions to develop.)

The stresses applied can be in the form of speed, distance swum, or "density" of workout. (yards per time period.) Stress can also be specifically applied in accordance with energy systems. A quality swimming program will mix the stresses in appropriate quantities and types for the group of athletes, and thus the individuals, being trained. The "mix" will be different for different groups and individuals, based on their previous training.

Thus, attendance at workout is a CRITICAL feature in making physical progress in the program. When an athlete misses a workout, they upset the delicate balance of "how much of what" stresses they apply to their body. In worst cases, athletes attend the recovery workouts, and miss the stressful workouts and thus never apply increasing stress to their systems. In the next worst scenario, athletes miss a series of recovery workouts, and attend only the stressful workouts and thus never get the appropriate recovery stimulation, and go from "sore" to "more sore." Finally, missing a "cycle" of stressful and recovery workouts means that the athlete takes "one step forward and one step back" and worse, comes back to a stress/recovery cycle that is now two steps up from their last practice a very stressful adaptation.

This ignores, of course, the fact that the athlete has let his teammates down by not attending, and has lost the opportunity to learn what is being taught that day.

NOTE TO COACHES: If you allow athletes to miss practice without comment, you are saying in effect, "It doesn't matter if you miss." If their absence means nothing, then so does their presence (mean nothing).

To help create good swimmers, we must have good attendance habits. Remind them of the upcoming meets, and something that exists to achieve there...goal setting.

With 13 and ups, we want to press for good attendance. For 12 and unders, we want to educate parents and swimmers as to its importance, while not stopping them from playing other sports as well. But make sure they know we consider swimming to be just as valid and exciting and involving as football, volleyball, etc. And remind them subtly that in swimming, "everybody plays all the time."