



Educating Swimming Parents by John O'Neil & Kevin Salisbury (1995)

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Author

By Alec Wathen

Coach John O'Neill is in his twelfth season as head coach of the Providence Men's and Women's swimming teams. A 15-year veteran of collegiate coaching, O'Neill has been the Head Coach at Providence since both programs started during the 1984-85 school year. He has been involved with various Age Group Swimming programs since 1978. Coach O'Neill, has a masters Degree in Education from Providence College, and has coached swimmers at all levels, including masters National Champions and world record holders. In 1988, he was named Big East Women's coach of the Year, and in 1990, 1992, and 1993 he was named New England Women's Coach of the Year. In 1994, O'Neill was inducted into the Rhode Island Aquatic Hall of Fame. Coach O'Neill and his wife Cindy reside in Providence with their three children, Shannon (10), Tommy (8), and Meghan (2).

Coach Kevin Salisbury is currently in his Fifth Season as the Head Coach of swimming at Clark University and has been involved in Age Group Swimming since 1980. The University of Rhode Island graduate (Masters in Physical Education and Sports Psychology) has been successful at all levels of Age Group, High School and College Swimming. Prior to Clark University, Coach

Salisbury served as an Assistant at Brown University. He was inducted into the Rhode Island Aquatic Hall of Fame in 1992. Coach Salisbury resides in North Smithfield, RI with his wife Lisa and children Kaitlyn (4), Jessica (2), and Rachel (1).

O'Neill: I've been involved with age group coaching for quite a while. What we want to relate to you today is a little bit about the background and what led to the formation of our focus on parents and why we thought it was a good idea to produce the "Take Your Mark" video.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank John Leonard and Guy Edson and the staff at the American Swim Coaches Association. Throughout the entire project they have given us a lot of help, advice, and guidance regarding Take Your Mark. It's a great pleasure that we had the opportunity to come down here and present this subject and this area to you and we hope it can be a great benefit to you and your clubs.

In the fall of 1992, I had a unique experience. After many years of age group coaching, I attended my first age group meet as both a coach and a father. I had then a six and an eight year old. I had been involved with a large club for some time, but at this point in my career I had a small club at Providence College and obviously a couple of them with last names were O'Neill. We went to a meet with some of their friends who had come out of the swim lesson program. So we had quite a few of beginner parents there and I got a whole new look at the sport through both their eyes and mine as a father. It became apparent to me that this can be, especially at the entry

level, quite a confusing sport. In talking with some of the veteran parents in our club and kind of batting around the ideas of how we can make this type of thing a little bit easier for them to handle, the idea of making an instructional video for both parents, children, and families to take a look at when they come into our sport came to mind.

The basic premise was very simple. Many of us growing up had a lot of experience in baseball, stickball, basketball, and some of the other sports but becoming parents, we realized in a lot of cases a lot of parents don't have any swimming experience short of going to Y camp and jumping off the dock and surviving basic swimming. Now their child is getting involved in this age group swimming and it's like nothing they have ever seen before.

We felt a video which told parents and children about the basics of the sport including how most U.S.S. clubs function, their role as parents, and what they can expect as their family gets into it, would be of great use both to the clubs and especially the coaches. It would allow you to focus on what you do best as coach, and it would allow them to focus on what they should be doing.

In January 1993, I gave my buddy Kevin a call and sprung this idea on him. I still think he thought I was kidding. Never having done anything like this before, we had a project for the next nine months. I asked him what he was doing that summer and we kind of got to work on this not knowing what we were doing. We sought advice. We worked on an outline. We wrote a script. We sought sponsorship. We engaged an editor, a camera man, and many months later in July of that year we were able to shoot that video. Not knowing what we had done, our editor went to work and a few weeks later we saw the first version of Take Your Mark. He made us look a whole lot better

than we ever thought we could. So one of the real key aspects of making a video is getting a great editor.

At that time period, we were rushing a little bit. We were trying to get the tape to the ASCA Clinic for the best ideas contest. It debuted at that clinic and won the Councilman's Best Ideas Award that year. We were very happy with the product. Many of the clubs across the country have been able to use this as the focal point for their parent meeting.

I would like to introduce Kevin who will talk a little more about it.

Kevin: I remember that day very vividly when John called me and sprung that idea on me like he says. My first reaction was, to relate it to this clinic, is that he has been playing around with too many of Vern Gambetta's medicine balls. I want to thank a few people also. One that is here and two people that are at home. Grace Livingston, who was then Grace Abbott, was an inspiration as we were going through this process because of the experiences and a great deal of education that she and I had gotten coaching together in Rhode Island. Also to my mom and dad, who were very influential in my swimming as well.

The video is being used exactly as we had planned it would be. People are using it in their first parents' meeting of the year, to not only educate their parents but to help the coach do his job which is to coach. We felt the more educated these parents would be, the easier it would be to do our job, and easier to do their job as well. If you don't currently run an open house or

some type of initial parents' meeting which I assume a lot of you do, we would highly encourage that. Again, we feel that if parents understand exactly what everybody's role and responsibilities are it will make coaching and parenting that much easier.

Here is a suggested format for a parents' meeting. In the beginning you would welcome new parents and guests as they arrive. The head coach and/or a veteran parent or both should meet them at the door. Everyone should get some name badges so we know who everyone is. After that you can introduce your staff. Usually the head coach would go ahead and do that. The board and/or parents' group, however you want to set up your program or the way your program is set up, would then be introduced.

Next, view the video Take Your Mark which is twenty minutes. Then you could pass out any literature pertaining to your program. We are not listing a lot of the things that might go in there because that is totally up to you. USS has a great handbook that is also very good. Then leave some time for questions and answers and maybe a little social at the end of that.

At this time, we would like to run the tape and show you exactly how easy it is to run a parents' meeting. A lot of the things you may say in a parents' meeting or in your parents' handbook, is now in a video. So, let's roll the tape and take a look at it.

(Video is shown — see complet text of video at end of this article.)

Parents can be your best friends, if you look at it that way. When I first got involved in coaching, I was involved with quite a large club, like a lot of us that start off as assistant coaches. Quite a few of the kids were involved and we observed a lot of things happening with parents. One of things that I really didn't understand as well as I do now is that parents will tend to think of their world which revolves around their children. That's a very natural thing to do. They won't necessarily see the entire team concept unless you teach them and educate them along those lines. That's something we really try to do in educating our parents.

We try to get them to know each other and we have a couple of ideas that may help you. We will feature a little thing about each of the members of the age group team in each of our newsletters. We try to put out a newsletter twice a month. The newsletter this year will involve both a feature on a swimmer on the team and a feature on the family. We would like to suggest that you ask a family to complete a very basic questionnaire that might include: the number of siblings; what the parents do for a living; what their favorite activities are; hobbies; these types of things. So that in a little blurb in your newsletter each week or every other week or what have you, you could feature a family or a swimmer. In that way your swimmers will get to know each other and your families will get to know each other quickly.

We all tend to do team building exercises during the year. Some of us will focus on in water fun things and some of us will focus on out of water events such as trips. Amy Parratto mentioned a hiking trip their team takes in the White Mountains. We will go to Cape Cod with our swim club at the end of every long course season to a water park. That's probably the best place in the world to take a swimming team.

We always focus that on the kids and the athletes which is natural but I would suggest that perhaps once a year you just have a social which focuses on the family. Parents really enjoy having a reason to go out. Have some kind of gathering to meet the other people on the club and meet the coaching staff. The more you can educate your parents the more you can have them behind you and maybe take advantage of some of the specialists on your team, whether that be doctors, dentists, accountants, builders, construction people, or whatever. There are all kinds of specialists out there. It is easier to get volunteers when you need them. All this is important to breaking down those walls that exists sometimes.

If we have a family come in and join us in December or January, we'll give them a lot of printed information on the club and say, "Go home and watch the tape with your family, read all of our information and I'll meet with you tomorrow night for a few minutes after practice." That usually takes about thirty minutes of questions away from your presentation. All of the sudden you've got a five minute, "Yeah everything is great". One or two questions and they are very happy.

We realize some of you deal with parent boards. They are in control of the club in some areas. We believe that as much education you can give them, both the members of the team and the members on the board especially, the better off you are going to be.

Question: How do you get those parents involved that just don't seem to want to get involved? Do you have requirements for your parents to put in hours.

Answer: The club I'm running now is my own. It involves about twenty-five kids, and it's easy. I have been involved with about a 120 member club in the past and we have required parent volunteer hours and we tracked it. The larger the club the more you have to get into that type of thing. For a few years we had a buy out of hours which seemed to help the fund raising a little bit. There is no real easy answer to that. You have to figure out what your goals are financially and what you want your parents to do. The model that Amy Parratto gave earlier that Seacoast is using with both raising money through hosting swimming meets and requiring those parents to put in some time with that. Also, running a bingo is very much a team and whole organizational thing that works for them. I think the smaller your club though, the less you have to rely on that. It's better when you can get people involved and use those people that want to be involved. You are always going to have those parents that just want to drop the kids off, come pick them up later, and that's the extent of their involvement.

Question: Where can you buy your tape?

Answer: Only direct from ASCA. For ASCA members it's \$34.95 plus shipping and for non-ASCA members it's \$39.95 plus shipping.

Transcript of the video “TAKE YOUR MARK! A Parent’s Guide to Competitive Age-Group Swimming”

Introduction

Hello, by taking this video home we already know you are interested in the greatest of life’s sports. My name is Kevin Salisbury, and my name is John O’Neill, and we would like to take you through an educational overview of age group competitive swimming. We would like to point out in the outset here that this is a basic introduction to age group competitive swimming. Throughout the video we will be referring you back to your own clubs to be educated on the policies and procedures of your organization.

Parent’s Role

The parent’s role is one of love and support. It’s vital to the swimmer that they feel good about themselves and what they are doing. At no time should the swimmer feel their performance, at workouts or meets, will effect the way you as a parent treat them.

Definition of Age Group Swimming

An age group swimming program has swimmers with varying abilities and age, from novice to the national level, and ages 6 – 18 (there may be swimmers younger than six and older than eighteen). Each program will

have different requirements to become a member and may have up to 3 or 4 levels of participation. The main priority of many swimming programs is FUN and at the same time provides young people with “life skills” that will be taken into their every day life.

There are time standards that are nation wide broken down by age and sex, as well as B, A, AA, AAA, AAAA divisions. The AAAA division is the fastest qualifying division. The racing course can be either 25 yards or 50 meters in length. Most competition pools have 8 or 6 lanes that are divided by lane markers every 6 or seven feet. There are two seasons in which swimming competition takes place, the short course season – meets swum in 25 yard pools, or the long course season – meets swum in 50 meter pools. The short course season runs from September through April and the long course season runs from May through the middle of August. Each pool will vary in both length and number of lanes.

The Four Strokes

There are four competitive strokes: Freestyle, Backstroke, Breaststroke, and Butterfly. We will see each of these strokes in detail later in the video. There are many distances swum with each stroke. Depending on ability and age there are distances swum in yards such as 25 yards, 50 yards, 100 yards, 200 yards of each of the four strokes. Freestyle is one of two events where we swim over 200 yards. The 500 yard, 1000 yard, and 1650 yard events are swum only for freestyle. The only other event of 200 yards or more are the 200 and 400 Individual Medley where each of the strokes are done for either 50 or 100 yards each, butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke, and freestyle in that order. In meters the events are 50 , 100, & 200 meters for every stroke with the addition of 400, 800, and 1500 meter freestyle events. The 200 and 400 meter Individual Medley's are also swum. The only other events are relays in which

four swimmers from the same team swim against four other swimmers. Relay distances vary from 100 – 800 yards and/or meters. In a 100 relay each swimmer completes 25 yards (usually for younger ages only), In a 200 each swimmer completes 50, in a 400 each swimmer completes a 100 each and in an 800 each swimmer completes a 200. Relays are swum in both yards and meters except 100 relays which can only be done in yard pools. There are two types of relays, freestyle and medley relays. In a freestyle relay all swimmers do freestyle. In a medley relay the first swimmer swims backstroke, the second breaststroke, the third butterfly, and the fourth swimmer swims freestyle.

We will now break down each stroke as well as cover other aspects of practice, racing, starting, turning, and training.

Lets go to practice

Safety is the number one priority at all USS practice across the country. USS has a safety chairman and each individual program must assign a safety chairperson before they become registered.

Equipment

Some of the equipment a swimmer will need to participate is shown here. Some programs require some or all of this equipment be purchased by the swimmer. (show male and female racing suits, goggles, kick board, pull buoy, paddles, cap, drag suit, fins, etc.)

The sport of swimming has a fitness side to it. Almost every practice conducted throughout the country incorporates a dryland program into their training. Most dryland programs involve sit-ups and push-ups with

stretching for 10-15 minutes before the water workout. Other programs add other dimensions to their dryland program such as plyometrics, medicine ball training, resistance tubing, and even strength training by use of weights. Every program will have its own dryland program design and will vary throughout the season.

After the dryland and stretching has been completed, the swimmers will begin the water workout with a warm-up or preliminary swim (some programs use different language for workouts) . In practices most programs circle swim in each lane to provide the room for many swimmers. Warm-ups vary in length and type each day but can oftentimes be repeated again and again. The workout will then progress into the main sets and conclude with a warm-down or cool down. Drills are often used in practice which is a portion of a stroke that is worked on to perfect that particular aspect or part of that stroke. Throughout the workout the swimmers will be engaging in “interval sets” that vary in distance and time. An interval is a period of time a swimmer has to complete a repeat plus the rest time. Here are some examples of sets.

Freestyle: The swimmer can swim any stroke in freestyle events, but the most common one is crawl. The crawl incorporates a flutter kick and alternating movements of the arms. Breathing is accomplished by turning your head to the side as the arm recovers.

Backstroke: While swimming backstroke, the swimmer must stay on his/her back at all times except when executing the turn. A similar kick is performed with backstroke as with the crawl.

Breaststroke: The breaststroke is one of the most difficult strokes to master as it requires simultaneous motions of the arms on the same plane. In the propulsive stage, the arms are brought back to the breast in an outward then inward movement. The hands are then pushed, from the breast, straight out in front of the swimmer either above or below the surface. The kick requires the legs to move in a simultaneous motion backwards. The kick, earlier known as the frog kick in lessons, is finely tuned into the breaststroke kick in competitive programs.

Butterfly: The kick in the fly is known as the dolphin kick in which both feet are together and move up and down simultaneously. The arms work simultaneously with the recovery portion above the surface of the water. It is the most demanding stroke physically.

Starts and Turns:

Many races are determined by the start or the turns. With the start, the swimmers are called to the starting position by the referee who makes sure they are all still. Once every swimmer is still and the referee is satisfied, the gun or electronic beeper is set off. Swimmers enter the water head first in a streamlined position. The backstroke start is the only start that is different in that the swimmer starts in the water. The referee gives the command to the swimmers to enter the water. Once in the water the swimmer will grab the handles or gutter at which time the referee will announce it place your feet, take your mark," beep!

The turns in a race are essential. With breaststroke and butterfly, the swimmer must touch with both hands simultaneously before turning. In

freestyle and backstroke a flip can be used in which only the feet contact the wall.

Let's go to the Meet!

Competition can be a very healthy part of a child's development. Self-discipline, goal setting, and physical conditioning are some of the most positive aspects of having your child involved in swimming. You must strive to make sure the swimmer is free to enjoy the sport and develop a positive relationship with the coach. Never interact with the coach and swimmer on deck. The swimmer and coach must give each other their fullest attention. You will, even with the best of intentions, distract the swimmer from the coach. If the swimmer does not get the chance to fully work with the coach with the support of the parent, he or she will never fully enjoy what they are doing, and will not reach their fullest potential as a swimmer or a person. Encourage your child to do their best and to compete against the best. By keeping the focus on their individual improvement a more relaxed and healthy attitude will be developed towards competition, and less pressure on the swimmer to "win".

Remember, your swimmer is not his or her performance. It's important that the child is aware you know the difference. When a swimmer makes a mistake, i.e. a false start, illegal touch, or just a poor race-, that when they need your love and support the most! Let the swimmer and coach work out a problem, it's your role to make sure your child feels good about themselves. Be positive, for any other reaction on your part, be it anger, frustration, etc.. will make the child feel more pressure to perform. The

swimmer must be able to relax, enjoy participating in swimming, and have fun.

Parent's Responsibilities

All support services in Age Group swimming are volunteer in nature. All timers, judges, officials, parking attendants, concessions, meet management personnel, and many other workers at meets are parents just like you. They volunteer their time, receive training when needed, and help run the meets. In addition, within your local club there are many areas which you can help with. Get involved and get to know people! If all the parents involved do a little, no one person will be over worked. All parents have individual skills which can help a club.

Positions which are common to most clubs include planning trips, special events, meet entry work, fund raising, back-up timing at meets, etc. You may not be able to help until you get to a meet, while someone else may be able to pitch in during the week. While some clubs have a formal parents group, others are informal and perform many of the same tasks. No matter how your club defines its parent's group, the message is the same. Get involved! Have Fun!!

Some examples of common questions include:

1. How do I know when I can talk to the coach?

Clearly, at times you will need to discuss things with your child's coach. If the coach has not given you a procedure for doing so, ie, call him/her during office hours, then please follow these guidelines. Do not talk to the coach

during workouts or meets. A parent would not talk to a child's baseball coach during a game, so do not distract the coach from working with your child at these important times. Send a note to your coach and let the coach establish through a phone call or meeting what is appropriate. Your coach does have a home life, even though it seems like they live at the pool. Do not call the coach at home, unless an emergency exists that must be addressed.

1. How many workouts per week should my child be involved in?

In general, most clubs will have a workout structure which follows the swimmers age and ability level. Children under 12 are encouraged to be involved in other activities, while maintaining a workout routine which emphasizes skill development. Ages eight and under will normally workout 2-3 times a week for about 1 hour. Ages nine to twelve will normally workout 3-5 times a week for 90 minutes per session. Older children need to make a bigger commitment to the training aspect of the sport in order to improve. Normally 6 workouts or more are offered which last about two hours. These are general guidelines; your club will have a specific structure to its workouts which will incorporate these principles.

1. How do I enter swimming meets?

Most clubs have entry procedures to follow when you need to enter meets. How do I know which meets to enter? Your club's entry procedures will detail how to select the right meets for your child's ability. Some clubs will involve the coach selecting events, while some will involve the swimmer selecting. It's important to understand how your club's entry system works and be involved with this so there is no confusion.

1. How do I know if my child is improving?

Most every club will keep a log with each child's times for events. As your child swims in different meets, the times are updated. You are encouraged to keep your own records of the child's times to double check the club's list. Keep in mind that there are occasions when the child may be working on one or two aspects of the race with the coach, and not so concerned with the overall time. It's important that the parent react to the child, and not the child's performance.

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Benefits of swimming

Benefits of having your child involved in swimming include the physical aspects of the sport. Your child will grow up and have a very good sense of their physical health. They will be stronger, have a lower body weight, and an increased awareness of the nutritional requirements which lead to a healthy lifestyle. Heart rate, lung capacity, and blood pressure all can be positively influenced by swimming. The psychological benefits include self-discipline, self-confidence, and a positive self-esteem. Swimmers learn how to interact with their peers, and quickly learn how to communicate and get along with people of all ages. Because of the demands of practice time, and the structure that the workouts give to a week, along with meets on weekends, swimmers tend to be very organized. This has a positive effect on their school work and overall grades. Many families get involved in swimming and enjoy the meets, trips and activities. One of the best aspects of the sport is the time you and your children will spend together meeting new people and traveling to places together.

We are excited you have joined the many families involved with age group swimming. Most of all, your child is now involved in a sport which is a great

deal of fun, promotes good sportsmanship, great friendships, and provides a healthy lifestyle for your swimmer and family.