COACHING BOYS

ASCA Fellows XI
September 5, 2012
Why the ASCA Fellows Initiated a Study on Boys Swimming?

The state of the young male swimmer is not what it was ten years ago. The number of collegiate opportunities is diminishing, team cohesion is evasive and although the numbers of male athletes are up, their commitment to training and consistent hard work is limited. In order to understand the current state of the male athlete - and how to coach them in a manner that encourages growth and vitality in the sport of swimming - it is necessary to consider the development of cognitive structures, societal impact and theories that govern psychosocial maturation.

The most important factor that has influenced and shaped the Fellows XI research is the multi-faceted impact of respect and how the concept of respect permeates the team-coach-athlete dynamic. Over the past decade, due to the great advances in education, the impact of Title IX and various shifts in the national culture, gender equality has evolved into an understanding that all individuals should be treated homogeneously (aka - genetically equal). However, it is a biological fact that males are different than females. Hundreds of years ago, the sex/gender differences ensured the continuation of our species. In today’s society, the very difference that ensured the survival of the human race must be treated equally (i.e. the same) in order to avoid gender discrimination. The result of this drive towards sameness has been a cultural shift in communication, education and coaching that favors the needs of females. Should it be a surprise that females are thriving and men are floundering? One of the most common complaints of coaches and educators is the lack of respect children have for adults today, but where is the respect for the uniqueness of the male child and his needs?

What is the Goal of this Study on Boys Swimming?

Swimming coaches know what it takes to prepare an athlete to swim fast. The hard part isn’t developing the training formula; it’s dealing with the inherent complexity of humanity. What is the intangible key that makes a swimmer tick? What is the “it” that causes one male swimmer to develop an excellent work ethic in one environment, yet completely leave the sport in another? In many ways, Fellows’ XI is attempting to do what Jean Piaget did for Psychometric testing over 50 years ago. While Piaget’s colleagues worked on developing various IQ battery tests to equate final answers with comparative intelligence, Piaget investigated the underlying cognitive structure to discover “why” a person acts or responds a certain way. Similarly, this project seeks to discover the underlying “why” or “what” that ignites the male athlete and the “how” of coaching towards ignition.

There is no universal answer, or even enough answers, to satisfy all of the questions the swimming community has been asking for many years. The arguments, ideas and findings found within this body of work attempt to stand on the shoulders of theoretical and philosophical giants that - until now - have not been applied to the world of coaching. Just as the fields of psychology, political science and social work have developed numerous theories of the “whats” and “whys” that govern humanity, so this project begins a framework for action and research in three distinct areas of coaching boys: Obtain (recruiting male athletes to the sport of swimming), Train (the physical and mental aspects best suited for male athletes at various ages) and Retain (encouraging continued investment in the sport of swimming throughout the male athlete’s life-cycle).
What Conclusions May Be Drawn From The Study?

Through the use of questionnaires, meetings, interviews, phone calls and the elaborated efforts of online research, Fellows XI collected a wealth of knowledge, information and insight that directly contributed to the construction and design of the pages to follow. Novice and veteran coaches were asked to share their experience and understanding of what it takes to obtain boys in our sport, train them to their truest potential and retain them to become not only leaders (coaches/professionals) but to maintain a healthy, active lifestyle throughout their life. This study will explore in various details, the effects of what we, as a swimming community, have done, and will do, to develop our young boys into the leaders of men tomorrow.

The Fellow’s Athlete Questionnaire was designed as a pilot survey aimed at collecting information straight from the subject population. While much work is needed to develop a valid, standardized instrument, preliminary findings indicate that, although male swimmers respect their coaches, there is little to no respect for their peers. The importance of group cohesion, motivation and individual success is well known and documented in areas of business, project management and group psychology. It is understood - thanks to research by C. Garcia (1994) - that male athletes are generally more “ego” or “self” oriented, in the male approach to “win(ning) at all costs,” they are more apt to break rules and blame others for failure1.

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"The Numbers:"²

Swimmers Registered with USA Swimming (FEMALE | MALE):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Male Swimmers</th>
<th>Female Swimmers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>88,538</td>
<td>42,733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>164,488</td>
<td>79,726</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notable Points of Interest:
1) The Olympics accounts for more than 72% of why male swimmers register.
2) Males are outpacing females in registration, however they are still outnumbered by more than 42,000

% Increase from Previous Year

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<tr>
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<td>66,488</td>
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<td>143,726</td>
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<td>2013</td>
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² http://www.usaswimming.org/_Rainbow/Documents/db2b00db-8156-44c3-8364-e2b4fd3e0b0d/Statistics-2010.pdf
To Obtain or Recruit Male Swimmers:

1) The club must furnish a safe and friendly environment that caters to boys and their physiological development (Dryland, cross-training, etc opportunities)
2) Friends (neighbors, schoolmates, teammates from other sports, family, etc)
3) A Respectable Male Coach and or leader that implies a good set of morals and ethics
4) Example: "Why do male swimmers choose specific [collegiate] programs?" The answer is universal from the youngest of male swimmers to the oldest (the 6-degrees of why males swim on a team):
   a. "I like the coach"
   b. "I have friends on the team"
   c. "I feel like I can be successful with this type of program"

To Effectively Train Male Swimmers to their Truest Potential:

1) Racing (on all forms: relays, kick sets, underwater streamline kicking, etc)
2) Separate girls and boys
3) Accountability! Boys must be coached with a FIRM but FAIR hand at all times. Refer to the Military Philosophy
4) Cross-Train (weights, running, cycling, etc)

To Retain Male Swimmers:

1) Leadership retains male swimmers:
   a. Positive Male Role Model (coach, teammate, local hero)
   b. Leader(s) within the training group and/or team
   c. Strong male bonding within the training group and/or team
2) Other Sport Opportunities:
   a. Open Water
   b. Triathlons
   c. Water Polo
   d. Masters
3) Reward System:
   a. Firm Praise
   b. Pleasing People (being the Hero; pleasing family, coach and team)
   c. Self-Efficacy...is the measure of one’s own competence to complete tasks and reach goals.\(^\text{3}\)