

News For

SWIM PARENTS

Published by The American Swimming Coaches Association
5101 NW 21 Ave., Suite 200
Fort Lauderdale FL 33309

When The Coach Goes To Nationals

Concern: The coach leaves the team for a whole week just to take one swimmer to nationals. It is not fair to the team and a poor use of money.

Response: It is an important milestone in the development of the swimmer, of the coach, and of the team when the first national qualifier is developed. This swimmer represents the current "peak" of the program. All parts of a program are important but the peak is of special importance because it is a point that all younger developing athletes can look forward to and work towards. It provides direction in the program.

It is difficult for newer swim parents, especially parents of young age group swimmers, to understand the importance of sending the coach away to nationals at great expense and while all the other swimmers on the team stay at home without their head coach. The situation is sometimes made worse by the fact that local junior Olympic meets are held at about the same time as nationals.

What are the choices and what are the consequences?

1. Swimmer attends nationals without coach. This is not fair to the athlete or to the coach. The athlete has worked for and deserves the attention and professional guidance of the coach. The coach also deserves the reward of developing such a fine athlete by being involved in the national experience. Attending nationals is also a very important educational experience for the coach. By not sending the coach to nationals with the swimmer the club is also sending a message to the athletes that the club is not interested in elite athletes.

2. Swimmer and coach stay home. This cuts the peak of the program and removes incentives for athletes and coach to become the best they can be. It is the mark of a team that does not include growth as part of its long range goals, or perhaps does not have any goals at all. It is a program that will always have young and relatively inexperienced coaches because few coaches will be satisfied working in a situation where they cannot grow.

3. Swimmer and coach attend nationals with the support and good will of the entire club. This is the mark of a program that looks to the future, believes in growth, and believes in rewarding the good work by both the athlete and the coach. When the coach and athlete attend nationals it is a celebration of team success. The athlete can return home as the hero and "tell the story" of nationals that will inspire the rest of the team.

What then of the younger swimmers who have workouts and possibly a meet to attend while the coach is at nationals? It is the responsibility of the Board of Directors and coach to 1) educate the families as to the needs of the whole program, and 2) prepare assistant coaches and swimmers for the opportunity to be their best during this time. These things should not be thought of two weeks before nationals, but should be part of each seasonal plan.

We are hopeful that parents will look at the larger picture. When the coach goes to nationals it is not just for one swimmer, it is for the whole team... and, it's for your age group swimmer.