

Suggestions for Coaching a Summer League Team

by Mike Lewellyn

Sport Development Coordinator

Central Zone - USA Swimming

First, **handle the important stuff**. You want these kids to continue on to the club team in the fall, so the most important goal you can have is to **teach and reward skill acquisition**. If I was setting up a summer league, these are the points that I would require all of the team coaches to accomplish:

1. Team cheers - start every practice with a cheer that is just theirs. Each team should have a cheer that is dedicated to them, and not the same cheer with different names.

2. Rewards - kids will kill each other for candy. Before each practice have a little deck session where the coach asks questions (and can even lead into answers. Don't make it hard) and the kid with the correct answer gets a stick of gum or a sucker. Questions should have to do with stroke, famous swimmers, info for upcoming meets, etc. Stuff they should know for the week and to establish heroes.

3. Skills - I would **focus on a stroke a week**. First Monday: intro to Freestyle, featuring rules and talking about the easy way to swim fast. **Teach kicking** and how to use a board correctly. **Teach body roll** to make it easier to breathe to both sides. **Teach long strokes** to encourage distance per stroke. Tuesday: build on Monday's topics, reinforce, remind, reward acquisition with **lots of praise** and "Attagirls" and "Attagirls". Add drills like 12 kick/1 pull to 3 kick/1 pull and catch-up stroke. Wednesday: build on Tuesday's skills, add 12 kick/1 pull, ^w/breath on both sides, move towards breathing every 3 strokes. Thursday: review and build on Wednesday. Add **counting strokes per length**. Play Golf! Swim 4 x 25 free. Count strokes. Do fewer strokes each 25. **Don't worry about speed**. Friday: race 25 freestyle and 4 x 25 free relay. In all races get time and count strokes, add together for total time. :32.6 time plus 20 strokes = 52.6. Do the same for the relay.

4. Repeat general form of first week each following week. After 4th week hold a swim meet with all strokes, but no IM. Do relays as 4 x 25 Free, 4 x 25 Back, etc. No Medley yet. But have all swimmers swim all strokes. Repeat this cycle all season, adding skills and proficiency each week. After the 2nd cycle you should have no one who cannot swim all 4 strokes legally, except for weak arm butterfly and funky knees on Breast!

5. Make up a stroke report card. Keep it simple. Use it when the kids race and send it home. Let the parents see the progress and have the swimmer keep them in a log to show improvement. They should also be **brought to meets** to remind the swimmer of what they must work on.

6. Have fun. Coaches should be allowed to be silly if they are teaching skills and getting the point across. The occasional "accidental" fall in the water, games of capture the flag in the pool, Sharks and Minnows, Golf, Dive for JuJuBe's. Have a poster making party before swim meets, have a pizza or sub sandwich party after meets (soccer does this well).

7. Have fun and **keep defining fun as accepting challenges**, doing hard things the best you can, doing easy things great because they are easy, define fun as looking down the road and striving to get there. **Don't be afraid to talk about Olympics, the dream has to start somewhere!**

8. Keep teaching and educating coaches. Have a weekly meeting to go over skills of the week and to share things that have worked in the past week so other can try them. Educate your coaches so they can educate your kids and their parents.

9. Keep the parents informed. This sets up the coach as the expert and not the goof in the stands. Have a parent meeting after every 4 week cycle and show the progress. Do it after the swim meet while the kids are stuffing their faces with pizza!

10. Officiating swim meets is easy. On the Friday race days recruit parents to watch strokes and bring funny looking ones to the coaches attention. Parents DO NOT DQ! They observe, see something funny, point it out to the coach, who decides on a DQ. Make DQ slips that are in the form of a coupon for a stroke lesson. If your coaches want to make some extra money, they can do private stroke lessons and the kids with the DQ coupon get a discount. Regular price \$30 1/2 hour, discount \$20 1/2 hour.