

First Meet Performance Expectations

Often disappointment stems from unrealistic expectations. We are at our first meet after training for four weeks. Please keep in mind the following points as you watch your child swim in this meet.

- A meet is just a “snapshot” of performance on this day, at this time, under these conditions. They help coaches and athletes learn what is working and what needs to be worked on next. They are not predictors of lifetime success as a swimmer or worth as a person.
- It has been at least 10 weeks since their last competition. They will be “rusty.” Although some athletes may achieve best times (especially if they have grown an inch or two), comparing their times in this meet with last season’s peak performance is unfair. On your first golf outing in the spring are you playing at your best ever?
- Your child may look like they are not putting forth the effort you would like to see. When starting out, athletes will be confused as they learn new techniques. No one has mastered all the skills we’ve been teaching so far. They must learn correct technique at a slow pace before they can do it automatically at fast speeds!
- We have done very little speed work (by design). They may look “sluggish.”
- It is possible to do a best time, and not achieve our technique goals for the meet.
- A coaching friend had the opportunity to stand next to a USA Olympic Team coach at an Olympian’s first meet of the season. It had been 12 weeks since the Olympics. Although the swimmer was in his twenties, his mom and dad approached the coach and asked what would be a good time for their son at this meet. The answer was simple and without judgment, “Whatever he does.” The swimmer went over 10 seconds slower than his best time in a 200 event. After all, this wasn’t the Olympics. The swimmer beat his best time at Nationals 10 weeks later! The lesson here is to not place judgment of a swim based on time. If we label our first swim of the season as poor, bad, awful, substandard, what does that do to the youngster’s self-esteem? What kind of pressure are we building for performance expectations of 6-17 year olds?

So, a good time for your child at this meet is, “Whatever they do!” Praise them for their effort, smooth stroke, or nice finish. Keep it fun!