

WHY DOESN'T MY SWIMMER GET BEST TIMES ALL THE TIME?

By Steve Mateer – National Team Coach, Lakeside Aquatic Club

This is a question most coaches get every year, especially this time of the season. There can be many reasons, but here are a few perspectives on what might be happening with your swimmer when they do not get a best time every race.

Age and Developmental Stage – 12 & Under swimmers usually improve throughout the season. They are consistent because of gains in strength, size, and maturity just through growing up. Racing can be more trial and error, but improvement can be more consistent with them than with an older, more experienced swimmer.

13 & Older swimmers, in general, need more specific and long-term training plans to achieve best times. The maturing process is changing; they cannot achieve best times by just showing up at practice and swimming. They are starting to need seasonal and multi-seasonal plans. In the early part of the season, swimmers are starting to work very hard, and frankly, they are tired. Most of the older swimmers understand this and anticipate it. However, this can be hard on swimmers in their mid-teens as they transition from age group swimming to "Senior" swimming. It sometimes takes them a season or two to understand the process.

Seasonal Training Plan – At the beginning of the season, coaches work more on technique. Time improvement is not as important as skill improvement. Sometimes, swimmers need to change how they swim. It takes time and practice to change technique and improve times later. This can be a "one step back, two steps forward" process. The coaches want to see these changes in the early meets, and this is the first time the swimmers are racing with these changes. The technique changes are happening and will help the swimmer but are not showing up at the first meet after the changes are made.

Tech Suits – Most swimmers achieve best times at the end of a season after resting and wearing a tech racing suit. Tech suits are saved for the big meets because they provide that "special feel," and if worn all the time that feel is no longer special. They are not worn this time of year. Tech suits are saved for meets where the swimmer has completed the full training plan to swim faster.

Athletes Can Have Bad Days – This does not mean they are going backwards; it simply means they had a bad day. I once asked a parent if they were better at work every day than the day before. Not every swim is a best time, nor is every slower swim a poor performance that can be explained. Sometimes, swimmers just do not have it for that race or day.

Parents, it is important to understand there are several factors that go into a swimmer achieving a best time. When your child doesn't get a best time and they are upset, the best response is to let them know you understand, say something loving, and move on. I will end with what I tell my swimmers at the first meet: I'm not going to use my stopwatch, I'm going to "stop and watch."

Thank you for reading this, and best of luck to your swimmer.

Sincerely,

Coach Steve