

Memo To: TAC Community
From: Derek Wall
Executive Director
Subject: Supporting the Whole Athlete & Private Lessons
Date: 5/12/2026



At the Triangle Aquatic Center, our mission is simple but ambitious: Developing Swimmers for Lifelong Success.

We recently received a thoughtful submission through our community feedback channel. A parent, reflecting on our recent memos on LTAD and movement economy, raised a question that deserves a direct and honest response (paraphrased):

How does TAC think about the balance between additional training - including private lessons - recovery, rest, and overall athlete well-being, particularly for younger athletes? And does the culture of competitive swimming sometimes create pressure for families to do more than is actually beneficial?

These are the right questions. Here is where TAC stands:

First, Importantly

Private lessons are a supplemental option - never a requirement, and never a measure of commitment or development potential. Athletes who show up to team practice consistently, engage honestly with their coaches, and bring genuine effort have everything they need to develop well. That has always been true and will always be true at TAC.

We want to be clear about this because we recognize that not every family has the same resources, schedule, or access. TAC is committed to an environment where an athlete's development is not determined by their family's ability to purchase additional services. If you have questions about what is right for your child specifically, your coach is the right starting point.

Private Lessons: What They Are and What They Are Not

With that foundation established, it is worth explaining what private lessons with TAC coaches actually are, because the picture is often different from what families assume.

A private lesson with a TAC coach is not an additional conditioning session. It is focused technique work: body position, stroke mechanics, starts, turns, underwaters, etc. The physiological load is categorically different from a full practice. Skills and drills at low-to-moderate intensity function much closer to *active recovery* than to training stress. More time in the water does not automatically mean more strain on an athlete's system.

In fact, coach-led skills and drills at low intensity actively support parasympathetic nervous system recovery (the body's rest-and-restore state) while simultaneously reinforcing the neural pathways that build long-term skill. Done well, a private lesson does not add to an athlete's training load. It contributes to recovery from it.

There is also a developmental argument grounded in the science we discussed in our January memo, *How Skill is Built*, and in Daniel Coyle's book *The Talent Code*. Skill is built through deliberate, coach-guided repetition that strengthens specific neural pathways - a process driven by myelin creation, the insulation that makes those pathways faster and more reliable under pressure. A private lesson with a TAC coach creates exactly those conditions: focused repetition, immediate expert feedback, and correct movement patterns reinforced thousands of times. That is never wasted time.

TAC does not charge our coaches for lane access to teach private lessons, a rarity and true differentiator for TITANS. We do this deliberately: it lowers the cost barrier for families and creates a meaningful additional income opportunity for our coaching staff. Both matter to us.

We trust that parents are allowing their athlete to own their journey and utilize private lessons when the athlete is engaged and ready. Our coaches are also a filter. They will not accept a lesson with an athlete who is clearly disengaged, over-extended, or simply not ready to benefit from the work. A burned-out child does not need more pool time, regardless of the true "load" of a private lesson, and our coaches understand this.

What the Research Actually Says

The concern about overtraining in youth sport is not overblown. The American Academy of Pediatrics published a [clinical report](#) stating that 70% of youth athletes drop out of organized sports by age 13, with burnout and overtraining among the primary drivers. That is a real and well-documented problem.

The research draws an important distinction, though. *Overtraining results from an imbalance between high-intensity training load and recovery.* Low-intensity, technique-focused work in a supportive environment is not the same stressor, and in fact is often an additive to the recovery side of the equation. Treating all time in the water as equivalent “load” misses that distinction.

The same research identifies what most reliably predicts burnout in young athletes: loss of autonomy, adult-driven pressure to perform, and an environment where results are prioritized over development and enjoyment. These are the conditions TAC is actively working to prevent, not just philosophically, but through specific programs and people.

One finding (that we have touched on previously) worth stating again: early specialization is not a prerequisite for long-term athletic success. A systematic review of professional, Olympic, and elite athletes across multiple sports found that most demonstrate better long-term performance outcomes following multisport participation in youth - not single-sport focus. The research is consistent: what restores a developing athlete's nervous system and supports durable long-term development is low-stimulation (read – screen free), autonomy-driven activity including unstructured play, other sports, social time, creative pursuits, physical movement that the child chooses, etc. These activities build broad motor literacy, replenish mental energy, and protect the love of sport that keeps athletes in the water for decades. The child who swims, plays outdoors, reads, and spends time with friends is not falling behind. In all likelihood, they are ahead.

Nori Pennisi, EdD - Mental Performance Specialist

TAC is fortunate to work with [Nori Pennisi, EdD](#), a Mental Performance Specialist and applied sport psychology consultant whose work focuses specifically on helping athletes, coaches, and parents navigate the demands of competitive sport. Nori holds a dual undergraduate degree in Physical Education and Psychology from UNC Chapel Hill, a master's degree in Exercise and Sport Science, and a doctorate in Kinesiology with a specialization in sport psychology from UNC Greensboro. She has worked across swimming, tennis, golf, gymnastics, and numerous other sports at every level.

Her role at TAC is proactive, not reactive. Here is what that looks like in practice:

- Nori meets with Challenge and Elite track groups approximately once per month. These are open conversations - not interventions - focused on how athletes are feeling, how to handle competitive pressure, and how to stay connected to the joy of the sport.
- Each year, the TITANS Leadership Council and Nori host parent education sessions specifically designed to address topics that this question raised: how to support your child's athletic journey, how to recognize burnout, how to keep sport in its proper place, and how to let your athlete lead their own experience rather than absorbing yours.

These are not common offerings at the club, or even collegiate, level. We include it because we believe the research: the parent-athlete relationship and the home environment are among the strongest predictors of whether a young athlete thrives or burns out. Coaches see athletes for a few hours a day. Parents shape everything else.

What TAC Cannot Control - and What We Ask of Families

We will be direct: there are limits to what any program can do. TAC cannot control how families parent their children. We cannot prevent a parent from creating an environment at home where swimming performance becomes tied to self-worth or family expectations.

What we can do is give every family the information and access they need to make good decisions. This memo series is part of that. Nori's programming is part of that. The open-door policy with our coaches is part of that.

What we ask in return is simple: engage with what we have built. Absorb our literature. Attend the parent sessions. Let your child lead their own athletic experience. Trust your coach to tell you when more is not better. And if you are uncertain about what is right for your child, please ask your coach directly. That conversation is always welcome, and almost always more reassuring than families expect.

The Bigger Picture

The parent who submitted this question closed by hoping that TAC continues to grow and that children maintain a lasting love for the sport. We share that hope entirely... it is, in fact, the whole point.

Developing swimmers for lifelong success means nothing if the athlete burns out at 14 and never swims again. The LTAD framework, the technical emphasis, Nori's programming - all of it is aimed at producing athletes who are still in the water at 25, 45, and 65, because they were developed well and they genuinely love what they do in the water.

That is the mission, that is the goal. Everything else is in service of it.

This is a conversation our coaches and staff welcome. If you have questions or topics you'd like addressed in future communications, we invite you to share them with us [here](#).

Thank you for allowing us to be a part of your athletic journey.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "DWall".

Derek Wall
Executive Director
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