

Memo To: TAC Community
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NEW VOICE, LASTING GROWTH

Why the right question isn't "which coach is right for my child?" – and what a group move really means

Every season, we get to watch swimmers do something quietly remarkable: get faster, get tougher, and most importantly grow into young people who handle hard things well. That is the whole point of our program, and it is bigger than any single race or any single group.

When next year's group assignments come out, we know you read them closely. You should. A parent paying attention to where their child lands is a parent who cares – that instinct is a good one, and we would never ask you to switch it off. We would just ask you to point it in the most useful direction. The story a swimmer tells themselves about a new group is shaped, more than by anything else, by the story they read on their parent's face. If you decide quietly that a placement is a step down, a swimmer tends to feel it. That reaction – the one thing at placement time that is fully in your hands – turns out to be the most powerful tool you have.

When there is a group change on the horizon, an instinct shows up that sounds completely reasonable: *I need to find the right coach for my child. I need them in the right group.* It is worth noticing that we happily embrace the opposite instinct everywhere else in a child's life. No one asks to approve their fourth-grade teacher, and no one expects one teacher to follow their kid from kindergarten through graduation. We accept, gladly, that a child meets a new voice at the front of the room every year – and that this isn't a disruption to their education, it's the structure of it.

A swim group works the same way. A move to a new group isn't a verdict on your child. It's a rep – like a rep in the pool or the gym – and the skill being trained is the ability to meet new and rising demands: new voices, higher standards, unfamiliar rooms, new peers. That's a skill that outlasts age-group swimming by decades.

ONE FRAMEWORK, MANY VOICES

Every coach at TAC works from the same long-term development model – the same principles about what a swimmer should be learning, and when. What changes from group to group is the person delivering it: each coach brings their own voice, their own rhythm and emphasis. We don't standardize that, and we don't want to. The variety is the point – a body fed the same stimulus year after year stops adapting to it, and a swimmer who only ever learns to be coached by one voice has been taught exactly that. A swimmer who learns to be coached by several has learned something bigger: how to walk into a room led by someone new, read what they ask, and produce anyway.

And here's the part that's easy to miss: the rep only compounds when it lands inside one continuous plan. A new voice built on the same foundation, aimed at the same long-term progression, adds to what the last voice started. Change the whole environment and you haven't added a rep – you've reset the arc and started the foundation over. The expectations climb, too, as a swimmer moves up: attendance, punctuality, owning your own preparation. That isn't strictness for its own sake – it's calibrated to what a swimmer is ready to carry, and then asks for a little more.

THE "COACH WHO FITS" TRAP

All of which brings us back to that opening instinct – *I need the coach who's right for my child* – and why it works against the very thing you want. When you go looking for the coach who fits, you're treating your child as the fixed thing and the environment as the variable to get right. Development runs the other direction. The swimmer is the thing meant to change and grow; the environment is what challenges and develops them. A coach who "fits perfectly" may be one who never stretches them. Learning to be coached by someone whose style you wouldn't have picked isn't a problem to solve – it's one of the most useful reps in the sport.

None of this means you should sit on a real problem. There's a difference between a style you wouldn't have picked and a genuine mismatch – a swimmer who's shutting down, a pattern that isn't resolving – and that one is worth a conversation with us, not a

silent campaign to get reassigned. Discomfort with a new voice is the rep; a child who isn't okay is a different thing, and we want to hear about it.

THREE MOVES, NOT THREE RANKINGS

So let's retire the up-down-sideways rankings for good. They aren't three tiers — they're three different reps, and each one is trained differently.

The advancement. It looks like the easy one and carries the quietest trap. The danger isn't disappointment — it's identity. A swimmer who moves up can start to believe the placement is the achievement, and then feels they have to keep proving they deserve it. *Celebrate the work that earned the move, not the move itself.* The group didn't make your child better; the habits that got them there did, and those are portable.

The lateral move. A new coach or training group at the same level — the one parents most often want to "fix," and the one that needs no fixing. This is the rep we built the whole system to deliver: a new voice, a new style, a new set of connections to work inside. The rep is the progress, not an obstacle to it.

The move to a group that seems to ask less. It's the one most often read as a demotion, and the one most often misread. Because our tracks are built around age ranges, a new group simply brings a different mix of swimmers... a change of environment, not a verdict on your athlete. What decides whether they thrive is the same across groups: consistent attendance, technique, steady effort, real attention to recovery and fueling. Own those and your swimmer will improve in any group — and TITANS do, improving at roughly 1.7 times the rate reported in published age-group research and setting personal bests right through age eighteen. When a coach does see something specific that a swimmer needs to work on, they'll tell you plainly. A different room isn't a smaller future. It's the same plan, with new lane mates.

What about the data? Won't my child be missing opportunity to advance if they are not in the "best" group? Simply put: No. Across all tracks and all groups our median time drops per athlete are incredible, with nearly 100% of athletes across all groups experiencing drops. Gold swimmers are improving at over 11% seasonally, Platinum swimmers at ~8%. TAG 2 swimmers ~7% and TAG 2.5 swimmers, ~11%. The list goes on and on. As a swimmer becomes older and more advanced, their margins understandably shrink, but even across our oldest and most talented age group athletes their improvement is substantially better than the published research/studies indicate they should be. Don't chase the times, focus on the process and the skills developed along the journey. The time drops will happen as a result of the athlete doing the right things, consistently.

WHAT TO ACTUALLY SAY

The standard advice for the hard moves is some version of *stay positive, don't dwell on it*. That advice is hollow, and kids can tell. You can't win a war against your own nervous system by pretending the threatening thing isn't there. Tell a disappointed eleven-year-old not to feel disappointed and you've taught them one thing: that the feeling is shameful, and now they're failing at the extra task of not having it.

The night the Knicks erased a 29-point hole in Game 4 of this year's Finals, Jalen Brunson — days from being named Finals MVP — was asked whether he'd thought about losing at halftime. He didn't do the tough-guy thing and respond with "losing never crossed my mind." He said *you're allowed to think about the worst possible scenario, but you've got to go out there and do something about it*. That's the whole idea, and it's the opposite of "stay positive." It doesn't ask you to delete the bad thought. It asks you to *finish* it.

The catch — aimed squarely at us, the parents — is that the "something you do about it" is not what the instinct screams for. The instinct says make a phone call, make the case, get my kid moved to a "better" fitting group. That feels like action. It's actually avoidance — bulldozing the rep out of the way so your child never has to take it. The real move is quieter: an honest autopsy. Not *this is unfair, we'll get it changed*, and not *this is wonderful, aren't we lucky*, but something closer to: *"Okay. This isn't the group we were hoping for. So — what's one thing here you can get better at that you didn't work on before?"* That sentence tells the truth, refuses the helpless story, and points the whole thing at what's controllable. They'll use it at twelve, at twenty-two, and at forty-five.

WHAT OUR PROGRAM PRODUCES

As already mentioned, through the core development years, ages eight to fourteen, the typical TAC swimmer improves at roughly 1.7 times the rate reported in published age-group research — setting personal bests season after season, right through age eighteen. And here's the counterintuitive part. A swimmer who improves that fast, that young, should have less room left than most — the early gains mean they're already closer to their ceiling. You'd expect the juice to be mostly squeezed by the mid-teens, and the research agrees: even for swimmers who go on to elite careers, best times in the sprint events tend to flatten out around fifteen to seventeen. Our seniors keep dropping time anyway — still improving from a starting point most swimmers never reach. And it

shows up where it counts most: nationally, about 7% of high school swimmers go on to swim in college. Just under half of our high school senior swimmers do (49%). That isn't a lucky swimmer or a single great season. It's a plan that keeps working — voice after voice, year after year.

THE SKILL THAT OUTLASTS THE SPORT

The ability to absorb a setback, look at it clearly, and find improvement because of it isn't a swimming skill. It's a life skill — the spine of nearly every successful adult, in every field — and the pool is one of the rare places a kid can build it years before it really counts. We are, quietly, in the business of developing the adult your child will become. Every group they're placed in — up, down, or across — is a chance to practice the thing that actually carries: meeting a new room and a higher bar, telling yourself the truth about where you are, and working the part you can control. The placement is never the point. The story you tell about it is — and the person walking out of this building in a decade is listening to every word.

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