

Swimming as a Team – how being part of the team can help you achieve your own goals

by Wayne Goldsmith

On the surface, swimming seems like an individual sport: **One swimmer...one lane.** Everyone swims their own race – using their own tactics and their own strategies.

But it is an *individual sport* wrapped inside a *team environment*.

You train in a TEAM. You all dress in team gear. You work with the same coach. You all train at the same pool.

The old saying “there is no I in team” is wrong. Every team is made up a whole lot of “I”s – individuals determined to achieve their own unique goals. But, the opportunity to achieve your individual goals is enhanced by supporting the goals of other members of your team.

Here’s a few things you can do to create a real team environment.

1. Think TEAM. The first step in performing as a team is to think like one.

Think about the best professional sports teams you know – Football teams, basketball teams, baseball teams, soccer teams.....what do they all do that is unique to team sports.

- They wear the same team clothing – they LOOK like a team
- They support each other on the field or court
- They arrive together (usually a team bus) and walk in to the field or court together
- They praise the efforts of team mates
- They aspire to a set of common goals and behaviours
- They recognize the great performances of individuals within the team
- They provide back up and support for individuals who don’t perform well.



So you know what a team does – now let’s apply that to swimming.

2. Before your next meet, develop a TEAM MEET STRATEGY.

Get the team together the week before your next meet.

At that meeting develop a strategy for how you can all work together at the meet and help each other achieve success for the team AND every individual on the team.

Much of swimming successfully at a swim meet depends on attitude – yours and that of your opposition.

A well executed team meet strategy provides you with a focus to help you with your own attitude and perhaps just as importantly, the presence of a well organised, well prepared, well disciplined team really **blows the mind** of other swimmers and coaches.

For example:

- Aim to all arrive at the pool at the same time. Set up a meeting place outside the pool where everyone meets at an agreed time.
- Wear team gear – everyone – swimmers, coaches, families, committee – everyone – look like a team.
- Walk in to the pool area together – everyone – as one large group – led by your team captains.
- Leave your swim gear all in the same place – a designated TEAM AREA – your team “fortress”.
- Stretch as a team – ideally practice the team stretching routine before race day and have the swimmers (not the coaches) lead the team stretching. Do this somewhere really public and conspicuous – somewhere the other teams will see you and become aware of how professional you are.
- Warm up as a team. Line up together in one line at the end of the warm up lane. One by one dive in until you create a single, continuous line of swimmers (all with the same caps and swim suits on).
- Team cheers. Develop some team cheers and use them at appropriate times. Some good cheering opportunities:
 - As the team walks into the pool area
 - As swimmers’ names get announced before swimming
 - As soon as the starting gun goes
 - All the way through the race
 - After they finish
 - As the results get announced
 - As they come back to the team area



3. Find a way to help everyone

The easiest thing to do at a meet is to cheer for and support **winner**s – the swimmers who are winning medals, achieving PB times and doing well. However, the real strength of a team is their capacity to help and support the swimmers who are having a bad day and not swimming well.

Not everyone can swim a PB time or win a medal at every meet, so plan to have a support system in place to provide strength and unity during the tough times.

For example, develop a “buddy” system between old swimmers and younger swimmers so that there are strong bonds within the team if things go wrong.

4. Set team goals and take pride in achieving them

For example:

Total number of medals won by the team

Number of relays won by the team

If you have thirty swimmers in the team, and each swimmer has four swims each, that’s 120 team swims.

Set some goals around these 120 team swims like:

- 80% personal best times = 96 swims
- 75% finals swims = 90 swims
- 100% of swimmers not breathing inside the flags on starts, turns and finishes = 120 swims

This can also apply to other swimming skills.

For example:

The team goal for the next swim meet is to be the best kicking team over the final 50 metres of every race, ie. the kicking of everyone on your team is the best of any team.

You can do the same for other swimming skills:

- The best starting team
- The best turning team
- The best butterfly technique team (or back or breast or free)
- The best finishing team
- The team who took the fewest breaths in their final 15 metres of fly and free

By focusing on the mastering of skills under race conditions, everyone in the team can improve important aspects of their swimming. And – if you concentrate on technique, skills and working together to achieve team goals, chances are most of the swimmers in the team will also achieve their individual goals along the way.

So remember, **TEAM** stands for:

TOGETHER EVERYONE ACHIEVES MAGNIFICENCE

