

Every Developing Swimmer Needs Two Adults in their Life...

My first full time coaching job was as the head age group coach of a large, successful program in New Jersey. We had a very strong and supportive parents group that rarely lacked parents willing to volunteer time to raise money, work at meets or become officials.

One of the most helpful parents also served as New Jersey's head official. He was a superb meet referee and a great guy; I loved joking with him during the meets that he worked. I coached several of his kids, but the first one was emerging as one of our stronger 11-12's while he was becoming certified.

He was a good swimmer growing up, swam for an Ivy league school himself and knew quite a lot about our sport. His daughter LOVED swimming as a 10-under. She was not great in her first few years, but she loved going to practice. Her best friends were there, and afterwards she and her dad would go for milkshakes. By the time she was twelve she had grown, her strokes had improved and she was talking to me about setting some very lofty goals.

Over the course of that season she would talk to me about swimming at practice, and then to her dad about swimming after practice. At meets he would give her additional tips in the stands after talking to me. He was never wrong, and often just emphasized things I had said to her. He was never negative and usually was both positive and constructive. We probably would have hired him if he had more time.

At our All-Star meet, she swam two best times in her first two races, but finishing third in both, failed to qualify for Zones in either. Prior to her third race she was very nervous and visibly upset. I was confused because she was having such a good meet, and she had been so happy after each of her races. That race and the next day went horribly, each race was worse than the last, but she kept getting up and trying. She actually swam pretty well on our relays both days.

She told me after warming down that she felt that she had let her dad down when she got touched out in those two races. He hadn't said anything to her other than a tip or two on how to turn around her stroke, but she could tell how important it had become to him as well.

The last morning I was talking to her dad while she warmed up. I told him that any developing athlete needs at least two adults in their swimming life. One to tell them the things they do well, the things they need to improve and how to improve them. The second to say "I love you—I'm proud of you for working hard—"after their best races and their worst. I was willing to be either, but he paid us too much for me to be the second adult.

He spent the day saying those words; after the first race, which may have been the worst of the weekend, and after the last two, which she went on to swim at Zones.

(author unknown)