

An Open Letter to All Members of Windsor Essex Swim Team

Re: An alarming trend of unscheduled training hours of club athletes

When you joined WEST, you became a member of a very successful swim team; in fact, it is one of the most successful teams in the province. It is a small local club which has turned out numerous top level swimmers. **WEST has been very successful due to its comprehensive program designed for each individual swimmer based on their age and ability. Practices beyond what the club is offering detract from the overall goals for each athlete.**

Allow me to describe my background in coaching. I have been teaching swimming for 60 years. I have been coaching swimming for 50 years. I have coached 2 Olympic swimmers at the Age Group level. I also have had many successful swimmers in the years that I coached at Massey Secondary School. This included many OFSAA champions as well as 7 OFSAA team championships. I was the first coach for the Windsor Aquatic Club and had many successful athletes in that program as well. I also coached football and cross country teams at Massey Secondary School for 25 years.

Over the last couple of years, I have observed a very alarming trend. I have seen young swimmers miss scheduled club training for non-club practices. I have seen swimmers come into a scheduled club practice totally exhausted and complaining about how tired they are from a non club practice. I have seen 10, 11 and 12 year old swimmers practice twice a day. I have seen them practice 2 to 3 hours a day. I have even seen them practice 7 days a week. Olympic calibre and professional athletes don't train this much. More is not better, especially at a younger age. **These non club practices disrupt and undermine the program that the club is providing and interferes with what it is trying to achieve.** This is not surprising as many parents are overzealous and want to hurry their children along, often leading to career ending injuries or disinterest in the sport. Years ago a parent told me that he wanted his 10 year old child to be an Olympic swimmer. With an attitude like that, guess what? His son did not make it.

Over the years I have observed parents of athletes in many sports push, prod and force their child's participation in their sport. Why not let the child have fun and have a positive experience? Why not let them learn instead of being over trained at an early age? Why not let them bring their best forward when they have achieved physical and mental maturity and can appreciate it more and it has meaningful relevance in their lives.

I am not that naïve to think that this letter will change many minds but I will leave you with these questions:

- What are you doing to your children?
- Why are you doing this to your children?
- What are you trying to accomplish?

Yours in Swimming.

Lou Pocock
Coach, Windsor Essex Swim Team