

News For
SWIM PARENTS
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Learning Good Starts

Concern: My child always gets beat on the start. Why doesn't the coach correct it?

Response: Differences in starting ability from one swimmer to the next is easy for parents to observe. Unfortunately, it is one part of the race that is not always mastered equally well by all swimmers. There are two contributing factors to the success of the start: learned skill and natural ability.

The simple fact is that not all swimmers are built the same. Some will always be better starters for two reasons:

1. People are born with a given percentage of different muscle fiber types. Some people have a higher percent of "fast twitch" fibers making them more explosive and capable of getting off a starting block faster. Other swimmers may have a larger percentage of "slow twitch" fibers and simply cannot generate the explosive quickness other swimmers can. It is an hereditary factor and cannot be significantly changed through training.
2. A study done several years ago examined the relative importance of the initial quickness off the block versus the swimmer's ability to enter the water and streamline properly. According to the study, entry and streamlining are of far greater importance. Entry is a skill. However, streamlining is only partially dependent upon skill. It is more dependent on body type which is a factor a swimmer cannot control. The fact is, that because of body type and buoyancy, some swimmers streamline better than other swimmers and will surface in front of other less able swimmers.

As for the skill aspect of the start, the coach can help the swimmer make significant improvements -- over time. Wouldn't it be wonderful if a swimmer learned a skill the first time it was taught? It is important to remember that swimmers learn at different paces. Despite the best efforts of coaches, some swimmers will take longer to learn a good start than others.

Do not judge your child's performance largely upon his starting ability as there are many other aspects of the race which add up to the performance. Even when your child masters the start to the best of his ability, he might still be "the last one off the blocks."

