

I Went to the Results Board to See How I Did

By John Leonard, President of the American Swim Coaches Association

It was a great teachable moment. Out of the mouths of young people come things that “set up” the coach for an opportunity to do some great education. When an athlete came over to me and started with the sentence at the top of the page, here was my response.

“Really? You didn’t already know how you did?”

“Well, I was sixth the 100 fly and 5th in the 100 back and....”

“No, really, you didn’t already know how you did?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, what did you do incorrectly in the 100 fly and what do you need to do to improve?”

“You said I have to keep my hips up on the back 50 and make sure I keep breathing every second stroke...”

“and so...??”

“Huh?”

“and so, THAT is “how you did”. Not the place. The place means nothing. I can take you to plenty of swim meets where you can finish first....and can take you to even more where you’ll finish dead last.....where you finish depends on what others have done, not on how you have done.....You need to measure two things...your time versus your best time (which is you against the previous best you) and how you did compared to the assignment I gave you before you headed for the starting blocks. How was your time?”

“Well, I don’t know, I never swam long course before.”

“Of course you haven’t, so now you have a time to measure yourself against...congratulations. And do you need a results board to tell you how you did?”

“No, I guess not.”

“Don’t guess. Know that you don’t. If you go to the blocks with clear goals, you know how you did without anyone else needing to tell you. You can evaluate the race for yourself, and “know how you did”.

“So what is the race for?”

“Two things...first, it’s always easier (and more fun) to swim fast when you are racing someone next to you. And second, as you mature, there is a purpose to “winning races”, but in the developmental stage, it’s a terrible way to evaluate yourself.....racing is stimulation, not measurement of you as an athlete, a learner, a person....anything.....Enjoy the race, but measure against your own best self.”