

That's Not It

By John Leonard, President American Swim Coaches Association

Last week, we had a Mom come to us and “inform us” that her 13-year-old daughter would be gone for two weeks vacation in late June, maybe another week after that. Her daughter was not much of an age group swimmer, but she has some endurance capacity and comes regularly to workout at 5:30 am and again at 5:30 pm daily. She works hard, demonstrates little talent, but lots of determination. Her mother is not athletic and clearly does not value athletics. We expressed our dismay that she'd be missing for 2-3 weeks in the middle of the most important training of the summer.

Her mother's response?

“Who cares, she'll never be an Olympic swimmer, so what does it matter really?”

This is a dagger in the heart to any swimming coach, and it is to me.

If we only cared about and worked hard with, those 52 people who will eventually, once every four years, go off to the Olympic Games, it would be a small, empty and meaningless sport. My response was “That's really not it.”

What is it?

It is the fact that young people need to learn to dedicate themselves to something that is difficult, something that requires perseverance, guts and the daily determination to get your butt out of bed and go out and push your body till it can't go anymore.

Why do they need to learn this?

Because their lives are too easy, too soft, too catered-for. Too many people carry them, make excuses for them, never allowing them to try to be “heroic.” Is it “heroic” to get your butt out of bed and go swim at 5 am? It is if you haven't done it before. Is it heroic to “make” 10x200 fly on 4:00? It is if you haven't ever done it before. Is it heroic to finish your swim and turn around and cheer for the teammate who is even further behind than you are, and is struggling to make the set? Need I say it? It is if you've never done it before.

And that is what “It” is about. About doing what you haven't done before. And learning that sometimes you succeed. Sometimes you fail. If you fail, you go again until you learn to succeed. It's not about being an Olympian. It's about being Olympian. Learning to be a hero. And what it takes to learn that.

Or, you can be Comfortable and teach your child that it's more important to be Comfortable. So, if that's your choice, I only have one question; What will happen to your child on the day when they are made “uncomfortable” by life?