



Surviving Swim Team

By Jennifer Wake

Each summer, thousands of parents and family members converge at dozens of pools throughout Lamorinda, spending countless hours volunteering for jobs such as these timers shown above – sometimes standing in the blazing heat, other times in the freezing cold – all for the love of this community within a community: **swim team**.

Know a parent with kids in swim team? Then you probably either know a fantastic “multitasker,” or someone on the edge of insanity.

When you ask about swim team, the discussion often shifts to the child: it builds character, teaches discipline, and offers a way to improve on a swimmer’s personal best. For parents, however, swim team can mean long hours at the pool, including juggling volunteer duties and multiple practice times, dealing with younger siblings, ensuring you have the proper supplies on hand, and getting your child to each race. There is also the fight against the elements: the blazing sun once the fog burns off at all-day meets on weekends; or the bitter cold once the fog rolls back in at night during the week. It is easy to feel overwhelmed – especially if you are new to swimming.

The trick, says Orinda/Moraga Pool Association (OMPA) board member and mom of three, Erica Zeidenberg, is sticking it out and finding a way to keep it in perspective.

Zeidenberg signed up her eldest son, Jonathan Glidden, for swim team ten years ago when he was going into second grade. Having never been part of swim team before, she thought it was a great way to get her kids water safe. “When we started, I had no idea what I was getting into,” she said. “I was really out of it. It’s another world. Meets are very organized; it just seems like chaos.”

Driving into the parking lot of Miramonte Swim Club, Zeidenberg was surprised by how much “stuff” people were unloading from their cars: gym bags, blankets, awnings, coolers, chairs, and even sleeping bags. She soon

learned how valuable those sleeping bags would become at the 3-hour meets on Wednesday nights. “Those are cold nights,” she said. “It’s freezing, it’s late; I just wanted to go home.”

She started packing a swim team survival pack to help her get through it: swim parkas, sleeping bags, extra clothes. “If it’s really hot, I pack lots of sunscreen, water, big hats, a mister bottle,” Zeidenberg said. She bought long, fleece-lined swim parkas, goggles, and practice suits that she found half-price online at www.thefinals.com. “As a parent on a budget, you breathe and realize you can do this.”

Lafayette resident Marti Kohen has been a swimmer most of her life, so when she signed up her son, Evan, when he was 8-years-old, she thought she knew what to expect. But even for this veteran swimmer, the “parent involvement was a bit of a surprise,” she said.

Kohen, whose two children have now been involved with a swim team for the past 10 years, says you have to prioritize and let your kids decide what they want to participate in. “It’s important for parents to recognize you can participate as much as you want. If your child doesn’t want to compete, you can sign them out.”

And parents can volunteer in different ways. “You can volunteer your time at Pizza Days, or do the communication, updating the website,” said Kohen. Subs are available so if you have little kids, you can pay them to work the meet for you. “There’s a lot going on, but it’s a community and you ask other parents for help.”

The most challenging aspect for new parents, says Orinda resident Amy Meckfessel, is learning the ins and outs of swim team. “The basic aspects of how a meet is run, what jobs are involved, what heat and lane your child is in for each race, and all the swim language is challenging for parents.” It takes nearly a full season to get comfortable with it, she said.

Meckfessel’s four children fall into different age brackets at Sleepy Hollow Swim and Tennis Club in Orinda, with four different practices each day, so she understands the demands of swim team, yet she remains a true believer in the sport. “There are daily opportunities for success, and the sport of swimming teaches valuable life lessons.”

Kohen and Zeidenberg could not agree more. “Once you adapt, and just see it as part of your summer experience,” Zeidenberg said, “you can make it fun.”

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