



Guide to Choosing a Swim Team

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At Penguin Swimming we believe that parents should know how they can make the best educated decision to find the right team for them.

Types of Swim Teams

There are two types of swim teams in Canada and the USA: Parent Governed and Coach Operated.

PARENT GOVERNED SWIM TEAMS

The most common swim club model in Canada is the parent governed team. Parent governed teams are generally non-for-profit organizations governed by a board of directors made up of parents. Parent governed teams in Edmonton include the Edmonton Keyano Swim Club.

- Advantages: Limited legal and financial liability for directors and coaching staff.
- Disadvantages: Frequent turnover of directors, board, and coaching staff.
 Parent directors that often micromanage the organization.
 Inexperienced Head Coaches struggle with successfully filling the role as CEO.
 Tend to be heavily reliant on fund raising revenue.

COACH OPERATED SWIM TEAMS

Many successful competitive swimming programs in Australia, USA, and now starting in Canada are coach operated. Coach operated swim teams in Edmonton include Penguin Swimming.

- Advantages: Continuity of vision and purpose.
 Organization, program, and leadership stability.
 Ability of the team to implement responsible long-term development of the swimmer.
- Disadvantages: Greater financial risk for the coach.

Swimmer Development

Swim teams implement a number of strategies that directly effect the long-term development of the young swimmer. To understand this, parents must first understand how Canadian swim teams work.

THE HEAD COACH

In Canada, the majority of Head Coaches are hired as contractors by the parent run Board that often has little experience with the hiring a professional coach. A 3-4 year contract period is common for a Head Coach with a salary range between \$50-120K depending on the team.

Often there is a written/unwritten expectation that the Head Coach produce "results" (ie. the number of qualifiers and/or the performance of the team) at provincial and national swim meets.

As a result, the Head Coach and Board often have no interest in developing and/or implementing a responsible long-term development model for young swimmers on the team. The coaching staff is often more interested in improving their resume for their next coaching job. This leads to overtraining (swimming too much, too fast), and burnout (too much stress) of young competitive swimmers. New parents do not see the number of swimmers that drop out of competitive swimming each year.

ASSISTANT COACHES

Assistant coaches are usually the first contact that swimmers and parents have within a team.

After talking to one of the most successful swim coaches in the world, Coach Dave Salo (USA), he believes that the most important aspect of competitive swimming should be on technique, as swimmers can be trained anytime.

Assistant coaches are often younger, have less coaching education and experience, and often do not incorporate nearly enough stroke development and skill work into practices. Parents should observe the amount of skill and drill work that is being done vs. straight swimming for 60-90min practices.

Swimmer Development continued..

THE TEAM

The team's position via the parent Board is to ensure that there is enough money to cover the team's two largest expenses - coaching fees and pool rental.

As a result, there is often an ongoing push by both the Board and/or Head Coach to prematurely move swimmers into higher groups to obtain additional fees, fund raising, and other commitments from families.

The collateral damage of this philosophy is that swimmers often suffer from burnout and overtraining from being moved into an inappropriate group pre-maturely.

THE OLYMPIC DREAM

It is very common for a lot of young athletes to dream to participate in the Olympics. In Canada, only 1:15,000 swimmers (0.015%) qualify to participate at an Olympic Games.

Once every 4 years there will certainly be swimmers that will be fast enough represent Canada at the Olympics, and parents should not discourage their young athletes from following their Olympic dream.

However, it is very easy for parents and swimmers to be caught up in the push for elite swimming to pursue the Olympic dream done by teams and coaches. This Olympic "hype" will certainly increase due to the success of Penny Oleksiak and the rest of the Canadian Swim Team at the most recent games in Rio.

Parents should be very wary of teams and coaches that are hard selling the Olympic dream, as the long-term reality is much different. In the last 24 years, only one (1) Edmonton competitive swimmer has qualified to swim at an Olympic Games! No medals, just qualified to swim at the meet.

Receiving an athletic scholarship to an NCAA school in the USA is much more realistic option for a national level Canadian swimmer, and NCAA schools are often where many Canadian Olympic swimmers swim.

How to Choose a Swim Team

DETERMINE YOUR GOALS	Are you looking for your child to simply have fun? Does your child display and interest in swimming or do you? Find out what you want before you begin your search.
RESEARCH YOUR OPTIONS	Check out the various teams' websites, and research their philosophies. Is the team distance based (ie. hundreds of metres per practice)? Is the team techniques based (ie. proper technique foster improvements)? The closest team to you might not be the best team for you.
INTERVIEW KEY PEOPLE	Interview key people involved with the organization. Don't just interview the gatekeeper, but the coach working with you child. If you don't like something run! There are always other options.
TRY IT OUT	Ask for a tryout period. If they say no, move on to your next choice. Use the tryout to recognize the coaching style and philosophies. If your child leaves the pool happy, you might have found a good team.
STAY THE COURSE	Once you have found a team, stay the course for at least one season. After the season is over, evaluate if this is the right team for you.
REVIEW AND REFLECT	Hopefully the first season went well ... now consider what is next. Did the season go well? Did your child have fun? Review how the season went, and what your child's goals are. Is the team best suited for your child's long-term development?
ENJOY THE EXPERIENCE	Swimming helps kids learn time management and the value of hard work. Enjoy watching them grow as they swim. Enjoy it all ... it goes by so very fast!

We strongly recommend you do your own research on each swim team and wish you the best of luck with finding the right team for you and your child.