

Niagara Disability Committee Meeting

8/2/2021- Meeting Minutes

Attendees: Dani Richards, Bobby Diel, Elle Noecker, Jean Lalomia, Katie Donaghue, Will Chidsey, Mike Switalski

Agenda:

1. Call to Order
2. Approval of [Down Syndrome Minutes \[drive.google.com\]](#)- 3/21/21
3. Approval of [Visual Minutes \[drive.google.com\]](#)- 5/16/21
4. [Deaf and Hard of Hearing presentation \[drive.google.com\]](#) feedback
5. Para Trials presentation
6. Becca Meyers withdrawing from Paralympics discussion
7. Next Meeting topic/ date
8. Adjournment

Call to order 7:50pm

3/21/21 & 5/16/21 minutes approved

Deaf and Hard of Hearing presentation looks good. Reach out to Phil at RIT and Mike's niece will look over the presentation.

Jean talked about being on deck for Para trials. Attachment 1 is the report Jean wrote up. Attachment 2 is from Susan Mechler of Central Zone swimming. There were a limited number of athletes on deck due to COVID restrictions and parents were not allowed to watch so many offered to time. A lot of precautions went into making sure the athletes and everyone on deck were safe.

Becca Meyers, a 3-time deaf-blind Paralympic Athlete, pulled out of the 2020 games due to being denied her mom being her Personal Care Assistant (PCA). She was denied on the grounds that there was 1 PCA allowed for all 34 US Paralympic Swimmers. Becca's mom has been approved by the USOPC to travel for all international meets since 2017. Meyer's decision came because of a negative experience at the 2016 Paralympics where she did not have a trusted PCA and could not find the dining hall resulting in her not eating. After this was when her mother was approved for all international travel. The committee was blown away by this decision and spoke on how at the Olympic games' athletes had their needed personnel with them as well and in 2019 the expected number of athletes in the Olympics was 11.09 thousand there were only 4.4 thousand expected at the Paralympics. The discussion of 1 PCA for 34 athletes is absurd, especially with 9 of those athletes having a visual impairment.

Next meeting: 9/20 @ 7:45pm ADHD, next meeting date TBD, topic Cerebral Palsy.
Adjourned 8:34pm.

Attachment 1: Jean Lalomia

For any who have parented a swimming competitor there are many questions that need to be answered. How do I best advocate for my swimmer? What level of involvement should I pursue? How do I help my swimmer become a member of the team and work well within that structure? How do I effectively support my swimmer in meeting the goals set? Successful support is a careful long-term process and, if done well, yields valuable rewards. This process expands significantly if your swimmer has a disability. While officiating the Paralympic Trials in Minneapolis Minnesota, I had the opportunity to speak with the father of Mallory Weggemann (S7, SB6, SM7), Chris Weggemann, and the mother of Summer Schmit (S9, SB9, SM9), Shannon Klint. Having spent so many years supporting their athletes, they provide unique and valuable perspectives. As we talked, four areas emerged as being vitally important: inclusion, access, awareness, and respect. They were quite willing to expand on the meaning of these issues.

We all want to be included and swimmers with disabilities are no different. When an athlete has special needs, the focus needs to be on "ability not disability." Regardless of classification the reality for one athlete is opportunity for everyone else on the team in many ways. It provides the coach with reasons to expand his or her knowledge base and methodology, developing techniques which work well with any given set of challenges in response to a swimmer's needs. It provides parents of teammates the opportunity to discuss and teach acceptance of those who are different. It provides those teammates with a golden opportunity to be part of something greater than themselves, the support of an athlete who has not traditionally participated in competitive swimming. Properly presented and overseen, inclusion benefits everyone.

The second major area is that of access. Facilities, information, communication, and equipment are all included in the ease or difficulty of access. Although most facilities accommodate athletes with disabilities, the team itself must be willing to make adjustments. Separate lanes and groupings with swimmers who have similar times will foster unity and not frustration. Publishing worksheets and schedules which are easily available to all are important. Communication, frequent and comprehensive, between and among teams and facilities being used for competitions is valuable so that necessary accommodations can be in place in advance, thus avoiding undue attention on the situation and the athlete. Simple, adaptive equipment can be easily homemade, perhaps even a team challenge to create equipment which will aid a new teammate. It is amazing what young people can do when motivated.

Awareness is the third category and perhaps the greatest intervention is education. Each athlete with a disability has a different set of challenges as no two disabilities are alike. Consequently, the opportunity for teaching the team about specific disabilities can be endless. It is "all about attitude" as Jeff Keller said and talking with the entire team as well as other coaches and parents is important. Bridges can be built easily with careful planning. Training with an athlete who has a disability requires accommodation, but once the team understands the nature and needs of the disability, most have little difficulty with adjustments. As competition becomes a possibility, communication with other teams and officials will smooth the way for successful experiences. As techniques and times improve, the potential

exists for higher level meets. Paralympic and Special Olympic competitions are easily researchable and provide excellent opportunities for affiliation and experience. Again, properly done, the entire team can feel the pride of accomplishment in that they helped support "their" athlete to success.

Perhaps the greatest concern of these parents is the desire for respect for athletes with disabilities. We often use the term respect without knowledge of its exact definition. The Internet tells us that it is "due regard for the feelings, wishes, rights, or traditions of others." This is absolutely true but rarely is it extended to all. Respect for others is consideration of and regard for those who may be different from ourselves and different can mean so many things. In its strictest definition it does not separate out any one group but includes all. The recognition and valuing of every individual needs to be our goal. It matters little if is having hearing impairment, a visual impairment, being a double amputee, having brown skin, black skin or white skin, being gay or straight, or an intellectual disability. Each person contributes something different and important to a team and must be recognized and valued as such. Parents and coaches guide, but it is the athletes who will have the responsibility to live the definition, reaching out to accept and to include all others. It is a difficult job in today's world, but so very worth the outcome.

There is tremendous satisfaction and pride in being part of a group which leads by example, who represents the best athletes can be going forward. It is more than just improving times and accomplishments in the pool; it is really about the people we are. What began as a discussion concerning Paralympic athletes morphed into worthy goals for each of us. Acceptance of others gives rise to inclusion. Goal setting and teamwork supported by each member of the team produces personal and team achievement. Communication provides awareness and fosters both access and respect. It is up to us; the next moves are ours.

**My child with a disability wants to be on the swim team
Inclusion, Access, Awareness, and Respect
Information for parents, coaches, and swimmers**

USA Swimming Disability Committee Mission Statement: USA Swimming encourages people with disabilities to participate in the sport of Swimming and facilitates their Inclusion in USA Swimming programs through education and collaboration. We seek to involve people with disabilities in existing competitions and programs for all swimmers rather than provide unique disability-only opportunities.

BACKGROUND

While officiating the Paralympic Trials in Minneapolis, Minnesota, I had the opportunity to speak with Chris Weggeman and Shannon Klint this past June. Chris and Shannon are parents of USA Swimming Swimmers with a Disability and U.S. Paralympics Swimming Paralympians Mallory Weggemann and Summer Schmit. Chris and Shannon spent many years supporting their swimmers on USA Swimming decks and now on Paralympic decks. As a result, they have unique and valuable information and perspectives to share related to Mallory's and Summer's development, practice, team, and competitive team experiences as USA Swimming Swimmer with a Disability.

Inclusion

Talk to your swimmer(s) with a disability and ask them what they need to succeed.

We ALL want to be included. When a swimmer with a disability joins a team, it provides a unique opportunity for whole team development. Through focusing on swimmers' abilities, teammates learn that there is more than one way to achieve a common goal. Swimmers may experience success as a team by supporting each swimmer's individual success(es). When swimmers work toward common goals differently, it builds understanding and Inclusion of each swimmers' abilities and how each individual can positively impact the whole. Inclusion offers coaches the chance to expand their coaching knowledge, methodology, and stroke development. When parents, swimmers, and coaches focus on swimmers' abilities, teams can experience and learn beyond themselves.

ACCESS

Talk to your swimmer(s) with a disability ask them what they need to be successful.

Facilities, information, communication, and equipment can be complex for a swimmer with a disability to navigate. Access is concrete compared to the concept of Inclusion.

Here are some practical ideas that teams can be incorporated right away to ensure EVERY swimmer has equitable access.

- Separate lanes and groupings with swimmers who have similar times and or ages will foster unity and not frustration.

- Set up team communication and spend time making sure all athletes (parents if applicable) know how to use and access it.
- Post practice workout/ sets to team chats ahead of practices for those swimmers that may need to know information ahead of time (some swimmers may print out workouts themselves and bring them to the pool with them)
- Have a team captain/ group leader send out a weekly communication to team/ group members regarding and changes for the upcoming week and or information deadlines (such as meet sign-ups).
- Have an open line of communication with facilities to ensure ALL swimmers have safe and easy access to the pools before practices start or any weather-related issues.

AWARENESS

Talk to your swimmer(s) with a disability, ask them what they need to be successful.

Every swimmer has challenges. Swimmer(s) with a disability may have more visible challenges.

Jeff Keller said, "**all about attitude**" talking with your swimmer(s) with a disability individually to find out what they need to be successful is the first step. After that, bridges can be quickly built with thoughtful communication and planning involving parents, swimmers, other coaches, facility staff, etc.

Training with a swimmer(s) who has a disability may require accommodations.

Once a teammate's peers understand what accommodations may be needed for success, most will simply adjust and make any accommodations part of each practice. However, when a swimmer(s) with a disability is ready to compete, communication is key! Contact with host teams, entry chairs, and meet referees ahead of the competition will ensure a successful competition for swimmers, coaches, meet staff, and parents.

Respect

Talk to your swimmer(s) with a disability, ask them what they need to be successful.

Swimmer(s) who have a hearing impairment, a visual impairment, amputation of a limb(s), brown, black, olive, or white skin, gay or straight, or intellectually impaired are recognized and valued team members. Each person contributes something different and essential to a team and needs recognition and respect. Parents and coaches guide. It is the athletes who will be responsible for reaching out to accept and include others. It is a difficult job in today's world, but so very worth the outcome.

There is tremendous satisfaction and pride in being part of a group that leads by example, representing the best athletes going forward. However, it is more than just improving times and accomplishments in the pool. It is really about the people we are. What began as a discussion concerning Paralympic athletes morphed into worthy goals for each of us. Acceptance of others gives rise to Inclusion, Goal setting, and Teamwork.

Individual along with team support produces personal and team achievement. Communication provides awareness and fosters both access and respect. It is up to us.