

How are the appropriate level groups determined for the swimmers by the coaching staff?

Riptide coaches are guided by a team-wide philosophy that drives our decisions, and we hope that communicating these ideas will allow for a better understanding of group placement decision-making. Riptide coaches work together towards a common goal: *Long Term Athlete Development*. Finding the appropriate training group for every swimmer is of the utmost priority for the Riptide Coaching Staff. Every swimmer should have the appropriate challenges placed upon their group, all while ensuring the swimmer is not given “too much, too soon”.

We here at Riptide value long-term progression for all swimmers and focus on having our athletes thrive in a focused practice environment. The Riptide program will foster athletes who will go on to be successful in all areas of their swimming, and in life. Each season, coaches evaluate swimmers for the best placement within the groups and reassign them to different groups as they age and/or progress. In order to foster healthy, excellent bodies and attitudes, this progression must be gradual and age-appropriate.

Group placements and transitions are based on many factors, including a fair bit of coaching instinct. Some of the most important factors driving group placement are a swimmer's training ability, maturity, a continuous willingness, and desire to improve, and prioritization of the sport. Coaches also consider the value of a swimmer being at the top of the group – never underestimate the tremendous value in being a leader. In the upper-level groups, commitment (practice attendance, meet participation, prioritization of the sport) becomes a factor in group placement. Qualification standards are not a primary factor, although they will be taken into consideration because those times translate to meet qualification and training needs. Group size and making sure that groups are filled with athletes who exhibit similar abilities and qualities are also considered. The following helps to better break down what the coaches consider when deciding to move a swimmer into a different group:

1. Training ability – the ability to hold technique while training on, and making, intervals

a. The coaches look at who the lane leaders are in a group. If a swimmer is clearly training above the rest of his/her group, then that indicates that he/she may be ready for a group move. This is a huge factor in deciding to move a swimmer up regardless of meet times.

b. The coaches consider if a swimmer is not being challenged by the intervals in his/her current group and would benefit from a higher-level training interval. This is another factor that is very heavily weighed when deciding on a group move.

c. The coaches look at a swimmer's endurance and his/her ability to start a set strong and finish strong. A high level of endurance and the confidence to push his/herself for a whole set is a determining factor in group moves.

d. The coaches look at a swimmer's ability to successfully hold technique, do streamlines and focus on other details, while also training at the highest level of their current group.

e. If a swimmer is not training above the rest of the current group, is being challenged by the intervals of the current group and struggles to hold technique and focus on the details, then a move

to a higher-level group is not appropriate as this does not lend itself to Riptide's philosophy of "Long Term Athlete Development."

2. Maturity and Attitude – Coaches take into consideration chronological age, psychological age, and emotional development. Boys and girls are often at different levels of maturity so that has to be taken into consideration when discussing group moves. Several factors considered when assessing maturity and attitude are as follows:

- a. The ability to self-motivate
- b. The ability to be a leader in all aspects of the sport (swim, dryland, meets). This includes following the team's policies.
- c. Respectfulness to his/her teammates and coaches
- d. A continual willingness and desire to improve.

3. Attendance and prioritization of the sport – At minimum, a swimmer needs to be making the current group's attendance requirements in order to be considered to move up. If a swimmer isn't making his/her current attendance requirements, then he/she is not giving the coaches confidence that he/she will make the next level up's higher attendance requirement. When considering swimmers for placement, especially for 13 and older, prioritization of the sport is a major consideration. While Riptide encourages and supports participation in other sports and activities, attendance at Riptide practices and meets should be a priority for those striving to be in higher level groups, particularly those aiming to enter the Senior Elite group. Participation in another sport does not translate as cross training for our program. This category includes both practice attendance and meet attendance, during the short course and long course seasons.

4. Group size – Group size is another important factor that coaches will consider when placing swimmers. We realize that the pool is a learning environment just like a classroom in a school. And in order to be effective teachers, we must treat it as such. Therefore, groups will be an appropriate size and filled with athletes who exhibit similar abilities and have common goals.

5. Qualification Standards and Times:

- a. Qualification standards are not a primary factor in the decision to move a swimmer to the next level group, however, they will be taken into consideration because times translate to meet qualification and training needs.
- b. It is important that the swimmer coming into a new group has times which fall within the margin of the current swimmers' times in that group. Coaches want to move a swimmer into the middle of a new group, not the bottom. This is in order to avoid a swimmer falling behind and struggling to keep up, which often leads to poor technique, injury and discouragement in the swimmer.
- c. There is an element of the coach's discretion involved in this category as certain swimmers may be within the group's average in certain events and not others. However, racing times do not directly correlate with training intervals and a swimmer's ability to train at a particular level. This is where the

coaches must decide where the swimmer should be placed to meet that swimmer's training needs so they continue to have the opportunity to improve.

6. Coaches' Discretion – There is always a level of coach's discretion after all these factors are considered. Coaches are the experts in the field in this case and their experience and expertise does play a part.