

# Defining Success

by Aimee Schmitt

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Recently I was privileged to hear Richard Quick speak to a group of young swimmers. Quick, head coach of Stanford Women's Swim Team and an Olympic Head Coach for the 2000 games in Sydney, Australia, was commenting on Summer Sanders' swims in the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona. He described how her

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third place finish in the 400IM was received by a disappointed press—and when asked what went wrong by the media—Summer strongly remarked how she not only just swam her lifetime best but also won an Olympic medal, and she couldn't be happier!! (Summer eventually went on to win the Gold in the 200 fly—and the press finally seemed appeased.)

- Two categories of success.

This story illustrates a very important point for any competitor—standards of success fall into two very different categories—what the world defines as success and what an athlete personally defines as success.

It is important to recognize these two categories separately or one's competitive career can end up being disappointing and unfulfilling due to a false sense of a “lack of accomplishment”. This is not to say that one cannot strive for what the world defines as successful. In fact, these goals should be a focus, but not the *only* focus for this reason alone—the world's standards can be extremely unforgiving. If not achieved, one is left with the empty sense of failure. By setting personal definitions of success a competitor can continue to develop as an athlete, learn from mistakes, and take joy

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from his/her personal accomplishments no matter how large or small they appear to outside observers.

- Establish personal measuring tools.

The best way to establish a firm foundation for personal success is to have a personal measuring tool of accomplishment. Swimmers can best learn how to set the parameters for their personal definition of success, and how they will measure their own success, if they have it written down. A logbook is the best tool for

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measuring personal progress. Within the pages of each individual athlete's book is their standard of success—past, present, and future. This internal pursuit of excellence can cover a broad range of accomplishments and experiences over the years—workout attendance, workout best times, weight room accomplishments, team spirit and positive attitude, personal best times, best splits, best reaction off the blocks, excellent turns and finishes in competition, etc.

With these successes comes the joy of personal accomplishment, something that cannot be taken away. Success is indisputable as each individual holds the proof of their accomplishments in their own hands—literally in the pages of their own logbook. Even perceived failures become stepping stones to success as they are recorded, learned from, and lead to a successful result later.

- Track personal successes.

There are many outside achievement levels that allow competitors to measure their success against each other—ribbons, medals, trophies, plaques, championships, records, national team trips, etc. While these outside means of measuring success are a needed, and valued, part of competition by giving everyone a sense of hierarchy in the pursuit of excellence---do not allow them to be misrepresented as the *only* measurements of success.

The true measure of success needs to be instilled from inside of the competitor. Carefully setting goals, tracking even the smallest accomplishments, and seeing progress over time with training and experience is the best way to guarantee the ultimate personal success. If Summer had allowed herself to only accept the world's definition of success—the joy her performance brought her—a best time and a medal at the Olympics—would have been robbed from her or at the very least, compromised. Perhaps, the old saying still says it best, “the only true definition of failure is in never trying.” ☺

*Aimee Schmitt is a former National Team Member, and Stanford All-American, and author of **The Ultimate Swim Log and Goal Planner™**.*