

### **Training for college**

"That's just the reality of college swimming at this level. You can't take off three months. I don't think our expectations are any different from any other program that wants to be at the top level," says McGihon.

Those are clearly the expectations at the University of Florida where American Swim Coaches Association Coach of the Year Gregg Troy directed his women and men to first and fifth-place finishes at the 2010 NCAA Division I meet.

"Training is not a nine-month deal," says Troy. "You're at it for 12 months and if you don't do that you are seriously going to limit your opportunities to be as successful as you could be. How you can work nine months and expect to go any further is just beyond me. It is beholden on the athlete to take responsibility. The people who are really great in their endeavors are almost always the athletes not taking breaks."

Athletes who can't swim consistently can still stay fit. Troy recalls one swimmer who cycled 25 plus miles a day, swam three-to-four times a week, lifted weights, returned to Gainesville after four months abroad and had an outstanding season. The reason, "he never took time off from fitness."

Anywhere from 50-to-75 percent of Gator swimmers remain on campus during the summer. At some other top-tier D-I programs (i.e. Arizona) the number is higher.

"For us it varies from year-to-year," says Troy. "But if our swimmers are not at school, the assumption is they are back home training with their club teams. They have to be or they are swimming at the wrong level."

As a result, virtually 90 percent of Florida athletes return focused, in shape and ready to go.

"Very, very few come back out of shape and some of those situations are injury related," he says. "We try to recruit people who have the expectation of being the best. If you have that, then you are going to be at summer nationals because that's where the best are. If you are at that meet, then you had to train to get there."

Getting there for incoming freshmen introduces a different dynamic. Not every athlete finishes a high school career like NOVA of Virginia's Rachel Naurath. She won six individual events at NCSA Junior Nationals, was a captain on the NCSA All-Star team that went to Ireland, dropped four seconds, finaled in the 200 fly at summer nationals and made the U.S. National Team.

"My issue starts when swimmers sign on the dotted line," says one unnamed Mid-Atlantic club coach. "That's a letter of commitment. I constantly educate my athletes that you have to honor your commitment to go to a school in the best possible shape and be ready to roll."

Athletes who back off their training after signing create problems for themselves as well as current and future coaches.

"As a club coach, I can't afford to run the kids out the door if they are not doing what they are supposed to do. Some coaches do, I can't," he says.

The downside for a club team is the poor example being set for other swimmers, failure to support the team and loss of points at championship meets, presumably from the best athlete(s). There is also a potentially lasting consequence for coach and to club reputation.

"If a college coach recruits a kid from my team and they don't show up in shape that's a reflection on me, my coaching and leadership," says the Mid-Atlantic coach.

Improved communication between coaches, parents and swimmers would improve the situation he notes. Such dialogue would more likely ensure that swimmers stay on task.

"Parents need to teach their kids to honor the commitment, not just say, 'Hey, we got what we needed.' and walk away. This is the one that gives the most trouble. No doubt about it," he says.

"It is incumbent upon all the coaches to encourage athletes to be consistent about their training," says Troy. "The kids who slough off after they sign lose focus on what made them successful and once that happens they don't continue to do the same things. Then they never really arrive, it's always a journey.

"It isn't just summer training, it is a matter of swimmer responsibility. Athletes that leave their college programs and go home owe it to those programs to show up in good physical condition ready to be leaders. By the same token, incoming freshmen owe it to their future program to come in as the best athletes they can be," he says.

"That said there is an expectation across the board that you can take some time off out of the water to mentally refresh. Short breaks from the water after big performances are necessary and appropriate as long as they don't extend into lengthy breaks from fitness. If they do, there will be a problem," says Troy.