

July 17, 2006

Dear Swimmers and Families,

It has been a wonderful summer swim season . As a new coach to the team, I've been fortunate to meet a group of wonderful kids this summer. Thanks for welcoming me and my kids onto your team this summer. It is always a pleasure to work with Coach Mike. He has done a wonderful job, as always, especially with those meet line-ups. So far, so good, but I'm not willing to 'rest' just yet.

As a coach, recreational leader, and even in my role as a dad, I know that there is still a lot to do. This letter shares part of a vision to share understandings of how good these kids of ours really are. As we focus on swimming fast at the last meets, and winning them if possible, allow a moment to reflect on this swimming community and some added opportunities we can mix into our swim experiences.

We have a great group of kids. Plenty of new swimmers came onto the scene and made great improvements in a few weeks. There are plenty of talented swimmers on our team. There are plenty of kids who are devoted to the sport too. A big group of our kids could grow into fine championship swimmers in seasons to come.

I've very please with the progress of the kids and want to give them more -- as challenges and experiences for personal and team growth.

Presently, the Crocs have a lot of boys on the team. This asset to the program counters a shortage of guys in age group swimming in the region. We can do better than the others if we offer different opportunities to satisfy and keep kids engaged and excited.

I've had fun working with these kids, and I'm sure Jen and Mike and Steve share these feelings too. I want to keep them engaged and don't want them to drift away for the next ten months.

So, let's play water polo this summer.
We can pull together a real water polo clinic and make for some interesting, extra conditioning as a bonus to this summer.

The North Allegheny H.S. varsity water polo team keeps many boys swimming in the competitive season just to excel in water polo.

In California, some combination swim and water polo clubs have more than 1,000 kids engaged in their programs. This is far more than a fad there.

At the college level, women's water polo has been the fastest growth sport among all NCAA programs. Univ. of Dayton, for example, started a water polo program and is giving college scholarships to women polo players.

Water polo, an Olympic sport, is played around the world. When we were in China, I got to play on a regular basis -- as guys scrimmaged a new college women's squad. (I've got the photos to prove it.)

When I published and edited books, we did a 400-page text book with a four-time Olympic polo coach. More copies were given away than sold in Pennsylvania, but it was in demand worldwide. Knowledge and videos are on hand.

I started community water polo at Plum in 1990. Jay became a 4-year polo player at Bucknell Univ. and then coached and officiated the sport at top programs.

Water polo is about teamwork. Its a ball sport. It is physical, like basketball, but without the head impacts of soccer, football and rugby.

Like swimming, polo is a technical sport and takes top conditioning to play successfully. It is a workout and lots of fun.

In Pittsburgh, once we get good enough, and build our group of players on a regular basis, we could enter a league with teams throughout the eastern states and attend a few weekend tournaments.

In Australia, guys in their 30s, 40s, and 50s play at high levels -- making interesting interactions with the teens. Polo is an intergenerational game -- and both boys and girls can workout together in a blended program. Some girls can play right along with the best boy players, no doubt.

The wee ones down under play a modified game, 'flipper ball.' Rookie swimmers can slip on fins to give a "leg up" on counter attacks.

I've got a set of the caps and a few water polo balls. We can easily use a park bench as temporary goals. They work just fine. So, start up costs are nil.

Some people shouldn't play water polo -- if you can't swim, don't want to or perhaps you have a blind eye. Water polo is a great sport, but it isn't for everyone.

We won't be playing a version of 'animal ball.' We'll be doing drills, skills and situation plays. We'll learn the game and build our conditioning, understandings and tactics. So, participants need to hustle and listen.

Soccer, lacrosse and hockey players can make the transition to water polo. All are goalie sports. Basketball, volleyball, baseball and football players can get into polo for its ball handling.

Gold Medal Olympian Matt Biondi played on polo teams before getting into big-time competitive swimming. He played NCAA polo while swimming at Cal.

Chartiers Valley HS has played water polo for years. When we played at Plum HS, word spread and kids from various schools came (Gateway, Kiski, Penn Trafford). Fox Chapel came to Carlynton HS once for a polo fun day. When I coached the Foxes, we devoted one extra AM practice a week to polo, for the sake of variety. Two did a 'senior project' centered on water polo that year.

Water polo is one extra activity of an action-packed aquatic program. Let's build up

an interest in polo and then expand programming activities further. Of course swim lessons, swim team and lifeguard training are the basics. But future years could include lifeguard competitions, Junior Lifeguard Camps, triathlons, open water swimming, fin swimming, underwater hockey, and kayak/canoe polo.

This summer, a group of the swimmers began using the weight room on a regular basis and we did some dry-lands and running. I feel that the athletes and coaches are eager to evolve the range of activities and make increases in strength and conditioning throughout the program.

Exciting accomplishments need year-round attention. Since some of the kids are charged up now -- I have a sense of duty to keep them going. Building positive peer pressure is good too.

If any mom or dad or uncle or big brothers might like to assist or play, contact us.

Recap: Water polo happens from 9:30 to 11:30 on Thur., Fri. and Sat. July 27, 28 and 29. *If possible, another clinic could be played in the mornings from August 7 to 11, times and places unsure. Stay tuned.*

Winter Swimming: Being a part of the year-round team is fun. I hope to continue coaching most of the swimmers on a year-round basis. You'll improve, and it will be interesting and challenging.

Thanks for the consideration and effort!

Coach Mark Rauterkus
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PS: Not overwhelmed? Ask Erik or I about the 140-mile, 2 day, camp in a tent, bike ride on September 9 & 10, 2006 -- called, "That Dam Ride." Cost \$60 per person. <http://mysite.verizon.net/thatdamride>

From August 19-Sept 2, Erik, Grant and I are going to Canada for a swim and sports camp. Plan to join us next year, www.campchikopi.com