

# IT'S ABOUT ENJOYING THE SPORT

By Jamie Marks

Swim practice started and Ryan is missing from the group of splashing arms. His father and coach, Steve, searches for him. Was he pulling on someone's feet? No. Was he at the bottom of the pool blowing water-rings? No. Was he in the locker room? No. Ryan is hiding behind the steps in the pool, just doing kid stuff.

Many years later, that same boy, boasts six gold, three silver, and three bronze Olympic medals, as a part of the 2004 and 2008 Olympic Teams. Ryan Lochte also holds the World Record in the 200-meter Individual Medley, 200-yard Individual Medley and 400-yard Individual Medley.

"Fun is the key!" Steve Lochte said. "If you're not having fun you're not going to do well. If you're not having fun you're not going to listen to your coach. Fun is the key word."

Daytona Beach Swimming follows the philosophy that nothing is mandatory at a young age and that it's important to enjoy competition and the sport of swimming.

"Ryan was a great basketball player, a great soccer player... that needs to be emphasized to everyone," Steve said. "You can focus and emphasize one sport but you need to look and touch base with the others."

These other sports heightened Ryan's need for competition and challenge.

The Lochte household was a very competitive family; from racing to the mailbox, to who could drink their glass of milk the quickest. "That grew into the sport of swimming," Steve said.

Ryan would be the first swimmer kicked-out of practice if it was a longer, threshold set, but if it was a time trial he would be the first swimmer on the block, according to Steve.

"What separated Ryan was not so much in the training, it was in his attitude towards racing; he liked to race," Steve said.

Steve believes that enjoyment plays a role in

the longevity of someone's swimming career. This gives a swimmer the opportunity to grow through all of the developmental stages involved with swimming.

"Social development is extremely important and I think a lot of programs forget that," Steve said. "If you're socially not having fun or not in depth with that program, it's going to be a short lived career."

For an athlete to reach the elite athlete level, there should be social, physical, emotional, and psychological development, according to Steve. Physical development involves technique, aerobic, threshold and anaerobic development.

"Those four areas of development will grow as long as you go back to the initial word, fun!"

Once those areas have been established, there is a transition from social development to talking strategy, at the ages of 15, 16, and 17, according to Steve.

Steve never puts limitations on his athletes. He thinks there is no limit to how fast a swimmer can go, instead he focuses on short-term goals.

"In order to get way down at the end of the road, you've got to take steps to get there," Steve said.

The sky is the limit, according to Steve. A swimmer can be satisfied with the performance they did, but they cannot be 100-percent guaranteed that is their limit.

"You've got to go beyond," Steve Lochte said. "I always dangle the carrot constantly in front of them."

Ryan has had to ask himself, even at his elite level: what are you going to change to make yourself faster?

"He has looked at himself from Beijing and said 'what do I need to do to improve myself to

become better, because I'm not satisfied, I have not gone as fast as I think I can,'" Steve said.

Growing up on a diet of Skittles and Mountain Dew, Ryan has found to change his swimming he had to change his diet; meaning no more McDonalds. Eating healthier helped him grow more muscle-mass. He has also added more to his weight training program.

"He can't do the same thing because all you're going to do is go around in a circle," Steve said.

Ryan did not start training weights until his senior year of high school. Instead, Steve thinks it is important to grow core strength by doing crunches and body-weight lifting, such as pull-ups, climbing trees, and push-ups; and also build some leg strength. Ryan also had a lot of focus on stretching at a young age. Daytona Beach Swimming's dryland program consists of medicine balls, surgical tubing and core-strength exercises.

"I don't believe in massive weights," Steve said, speaking about his age-group swimmers. "If you don't shave, don't lift the weight."

Another focus of Steve's was technique. The philosophy at Daytona Beach swimming is to work with all four strokes and a lot of Individual Medley training emphasis.

"We don't know whether you're a breastroker or a butterflyer at the age of 10, 11 or 12, or even 13 or 14," Steve said. "As the body changes, so do the strokes and the emphasis of the strokes, and the strengths of that body change to adhere to a better stroke."

Steve took advantage of the underwater window that they had at Daytona Beach Swimming's training facility, and video taped Ryan a lot.

"I think everybody can learn by visual," Steve said. "I did a lot of video taping and spent a lot of time in stroke technique."

The terminology for his technique that Ryan

## Enjoying the Sport *(Continued)*

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used as a young swimmer, with Steve as his coach, he continues to use today.

"The same terminology he picks up on it right away because as he grew physically and became stronger his assets towards that stroke changed," Steve said. "We have to go back to the fundamentals; what I call the 'soft touch.'"

The "soft touch" is when Ryan is moving fast but it appears he is not; it is a smooth stroke with less resistance.

"He used to glide through the water," Steve

said. "Now, he's gliding through the water with a little more muscle."

The technique Steve instilled in Ryan and his competitive mentality have proven him to be a world-class swimmer. The first race Steve noticed Ryan jump from a Senior-National swimmer to a World-Class swimmer was at Senior Nationals in Minneapolis, when Ryan was in high school. He was sitting in 5th place in his heat for the 800-meter-Freestyle, at the 600-meter turn. After that turn, Ryan started picking up speed and his body became elevated in the water.

"That is a stroke and a fire and the ability to switch gears like that, because I've seen it in world-class swimming, and I said 'wow,'" Steve said. "I distinctly remember in Minneapolis, I thought to myself 'that kid's world-class.'"

Overall, Ryan lives by three rules: one, listen to your coach, two, come out onto the pool deck with a little goal that will help him go faster.

"And thirdly, his biggest thing is have fun," Steve said. "Bottom line, have fun; because if you're having fun, you're going to do it well." ■