

Characteristics of a Champion

By Jip Rusnak. January/February 2007 issue of *Splash Magazine*.

“The elusive characteristics that separate elite swimmers from the rest of us have always fascinated me. What have they got that most of us don’t?

I mean, we work hard. We show up for practice every day, twice a day. We listen to our coaches. We eat right. We do our dry-land.

So, why aren’t we all Olympic contenders? Why don’t we all qualify for Nationals? For Sectionals? For our LSC championships?

I honestly can’t say for sure. Maybe they have some inherent talent we don’t have, something the lucky few were born with. That’s certainly a possibility.

But let’s go back and look at it for a second.

We say we work hard, but are we working hard enough? Is it possible that – somehow, someway – they work harder? Is every repeat of every set just as important to us as the first and the last? Or do we rest a little bit on the sixth 100 when we know we have 10 to do? Do you think Michael Phelps would do that?

We say we show up for practice every day, twice a day, but do we really *show up* for practice? Could it be that sometimes our minds are elsewhere? Are we truly focusing on the task at hand, or do we sometimes go through the motions of swimming lap after lap? What do you think Katie Hoff does?

We say we listen to our coaches, but do we really? Or do we listen only when they’re telling us something we want to hear? Do we sometimes dismiss their advice because we think it’s too difficult for us to change, or because we feel that it’s not important, or because we think we already know what to do to swim fast? What do you think Natalie Coughlin does?

We say we eat right, but do we? Have we taken time to really educate ourselves on how to fuel our body for optimal performance? Do you think Cullen Jones has?

It never hurts to look at our training habits objectively and ask ourselves if we’re doing absolutely everything we possibly can to be the best swimmers we can possibly be. After evaluating the situation, then we’ve got to make the necessary adjustments.

If we can do that, we’re on our way.

No, there’s no guarantee we’ll someday be standing atop the medals podium with Olympic gold draped around our necks, but we will come away from the sport knowing we’ve reached our absolute potential. There will be no regrets, no questions, no what-ifs – only pride in our accomplishments, knowing we’ve reached the pinnacle of our abilities.

We’ve got a name for people who are able to do that. We call them champions.

We dedicate this issue of *Splash* to all you aspiring champions out there. Hopefully, it will give you the inspiration you need to reach new heights in your swimming.

Now get out there and go after it.”

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