The Redwoods Group Insurance Program for YMCAs

LESSONS IN THE NEWS

TOPIC – Swim Coach Nearly Drowns During Hypoxic Training Event

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[State] high school swimmer rescues coach from pool

MIDWEST - January 18, 2009: A high school swimming coach passed out while under water and was rescued by a freshman team member who spotted that he was in trouble and dragged him to the side of the pool.

Coach [name] had challenged team members to see whether any of them could swim farther than him without coming up for air during Wednesday afternoon's practice. Freshman [name] said [coach] was on his third lap when she saw him suddenly twist and float toward the surface, but his head remained underwater.

"People said, 'Oh, [name of freshman team member], he's just faking,'" the 15-year-old said of her coach. "I got in and went in the lane next to him, and I thought, 'I don't know that he's OK.'"

[Freshman team member] saw that [coach] was stiff and his face was blue and began to pull him across the lanes to the edge of the pool. Because of his weight, [freshman team member] was forced to stay underwater while she dragged [coach].

Another coach dove into the water to help pull out an unresponsive [coach], and a student on duty as a lifeguard performed CPR. [Coach], who soon began coughing and gasped for breath, spent the night in the hospital before being released.

"It was just adrenaline," [freshman team member] said about the rescue. "Everybody wants to give me so much credit, but I think that those others who helped should be given credit, too."

[Coach] was back coaching the team at a swim meet on Saturday.

"There could have been a lot of bad things that happened to me," he said. "I'm very grateful everyone acted quickly."

[Coach] said his near-drowning experience was a valuable lesson for the swimmers. "This shows that safety is very important and it doesn't matter how good of an athlete you are," he said.

What published sources say

- A swim coach challenged his team members to swim farther than him without coming up for air – on his third lap he ceased swimming

- He was rescued by a 15-year-old swim team member who was assisted by another coach

- It was the swim team member, not the lifeguard, who spotted the coach's distress; once extricated by the swim team member and coach the lifeguard did administer CPR

- The coach's words, after the fact, were "This shows that safety is very important and it doesn't matter how good of an athlete you are."

What published sources don't say

- Pool protocols and procedures

  - Number, positioning, and equipping of lifeguard(s)

  - Preparedness, training, and credentials of guards

  - Whether the pool (or the swim team and high school) had restrictions or guidelines regarding hypoxic training and underwater swimming

- Where the lifeguard was and what he was doing that caused a 15-year-old swim team member to be the initiator of the rescue – enough time evidently elapsed for some fellow swim team members to observe the coach and tell the 15-year-old that the coach was faking – fortunately she responded anyway

What we must consider

- Swim team members generally are very competent swimmers but emergency situations can still arise during their use of the pool. A designated lifeguard should <u>always</u> be stationed at the water's edge properly equipped and diligently scanning to identify a swimmer in distress – even for swim team use

- Hypoxic training and underwater swimming for distance are potentially deadly activities that <u>should not be permitted</u> in our facilities by any individual or group – see also

  [Lessons in the News - Swimmers' endurance technique can be deadly](#)

  [RMA - Breath Holding and Shallow Water Blackout](#)

  [Aquatic Alert - Hypoxic Training Death](#)

  [Lessons in the News - Breath-Hold Swimming and Diving](#)

  [Lessons in the News - Breath holding record](#)

- Although it provides no proven benefit to swimmers, hypoxic training is utilized by some coaches and swimming programs. Don't assume that all swim teams who use your pools understand your policy or know the difference between breathing control and hypoxic training. It is wise to require and obtain written acknowledgement of and agreement to enforce this policy from swim team coaches, swimmers, and other visiting programs.

- A lifeguard's role is to ensure the safety of swimmers – that includes enforcing pool safety protocols. All lifeguards should be thoroughly knowledgeable regarding the dangers of shallow water blackout. They should understand that they have the power and responsibility to stop any hypoxic activity that is being done in their pools. Management should clearly communicate their support of the lifeguards in the enforcement of this policy.

Conclusion

Shallow water blackout most often involves well-conditioned swimmers and it occurs without warning. Lifeguards and pool managers must be alert for this very dangerous practice and must intervene the moment it is identified. Only through education and enforcement by the entire swimming community can we stop this dangerous practice.

Please call us at 800-463-8546 to discuss this or any other risk management safety tip, or visit our web site at <u>www.redwoodsgroup.com</u> to learn more about YMCA risk management related issues.