

## **THE BLACKLINE EXPERIENCE**

Here is the what and why behind Blackline Aquatics (BLA) and our involvement. BLA has been in existence now for 10 years. First, BLA is a coach-operated partnership between two teams, Barracuda Aquatics Club (BAC) and Dolphin Aquatic Team (DAT). The partnership only involves our swimmers at swim meets. Both clubs operate separately financially and day to day operations. BAC only involves the 13 & Older swimmers with BLA at meets, all of our 12 & Under swimmers are attached to BAC at meets. First, I want to define the original reasons for why BAC started this coach-operated partnership.

There were four main objectives for the partnership. In no particular order, the first reason was to increase participation and the competitive swimming experience by creating more relay opportunities at every meet. We wanted all of our swimmers to have the full competitive swimming experience by increasing their relay opportunities. The second was to help decrease the possibility of swimmers jumping teams by increasing the opportunities at all levels. This problem does exist in the Twin Cities area because of the close proximity of all the teams. The third was to create a better opportunity for our swimmers to meet and develop new friendships with swimmers from other teams. Most of our meets are zoned into three different meets on a given weekend. And, the teams change from meet to meet. With this format there really is not a good opportunity for our swimmers to meet and/or develop friendships other than from BAC. We wanted to give them that opportunity. The fourth reason was to help moderate size teams create opportunities for swimmers to reach National level swimming. The clubs all have size limitations because of various reasons within their community. BAC's limitations involve pool space and time in both Bloomington and Shakopee. This club has an approximate limit on membership of about 140 because of our pool limitations. BLA helps us be able to create the same opportunities that the bigger size teams can for their swimmers at the National level.

From the 10 years I have also seen benefits from the coaching side that I do not think were originally seen as possible objectives. BLA has created a group of mutually supported coaching relationships based upon sharing of ideas and trust. It has also prevented coaches from struggling to "reinvent the wheel" as they progress through their coaching.

With the 10 years also came an evolution of our team and different needs. BAC only has the 13 year old swimmers and above attached to BLA. All of our 12 & Unders are attached to BAC at meets. The reason is that we need to make the developmental swimmers feel more connected to the rest of the 12 & Unders on the team at meets by creating relay opportunities with the age groupers. By creating those relays it will also help us display the full competitive swimming experience to a group (developmental) that needs to see it. This also I believe helps the 12 & Unders understand the BAC philosophies and develop a pride in BAC first before becoming a part of BLA. Because of our increase over the years in participation at meets I believe we can maintain the opportunities that were developed through BLA on relays for our 12 & Unders. Plus, our 13 & older swimmers will still have the opportunity to benefit from all of the original reasons. I believe this group has the potential to benefit the greatest by having the National swimming opportunity and by being involved with very competitive relays at all meets. We have benefited at the National level in past years with numerous swimmers competing at the National Championships on relays. That number will continue over the next few seasons. With our swimmers focusing more on performance at the older ages they will also have the opportunity to become a part of some very competitive relays with BLA at every level.

If you have any questions about any of the items listed above please do not hesitate to call Jeff on the hotline or e-mail him at [MNFECDUDAS@aol.com](mailto:MNFECDUDAS@aol.com).