

My Man Dan...

By Mike McCauley

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I drove to the pool that Monday afternoon, and I got a text from one of my swimmers. "I won't be at practice today...I'm at the hospital..."

And as I come to the end of the season, with all my swimmers in prep mode for their various championship meets, it always gets a little tough. We, coach and athlete, are plagued by the unforeseeable. What's going to happen?

I always get excited during this period because I know that, in the end...succeed to a certain degree or fail big...my kids will be forced to handle the outcome, no matter what. And how they handle each outcome is what helps to drive their character development and long-term success chances. Maybe they will be arrogant, maybe they will throw a fit...or maybe, just maybe, each of my athletes will use their various experiences as motivation to become better. Become better where? In school, with their parents, in training, in their future jobs...everywhere! If I can get them to solve a riddle that plagues most, then I get to taste a little success as their coach. What's that riddle you ask? Here it is: How do you turn success, failure, or hard times, into an empowering situation?

Back in my car...naturally I called him right away. No answer. Dang it! What's happened? I got a text response to my call. "They think I have diabetes." What?!?! DIABETES?!?! You can imagine all the things that went flying through my head. That's impossible. It can't be right. That's not fair. He was just tearing up last Friday's workout, shook my hand, told me thanks for the workout, and went home...nothing out of the ordinary there. What's going to happen?

Now I find it interesting that I asked myself the same question, only now, I suddenly didn't care about what used to be at the forefront of my mind. Swimming, what? My priorities shifted quickly, a 180-degree turn to say the least. My man Dan...what's going to happen?

Obviously my role was to relax my swimmers when I drove up to the pool. I was sure they already knew something. So I walked in, gathered up my kids, and told them about their teammate. We had a good workout that day...a tribute to my kids rolling with something unexpected but able to stay focused on the task at hand. They all wanted to help, but understood that there was nothing at the immediate moment to do for him, except complete a good workout.

The next morning, I drove down to Texas Children's Hospital. On the way down, I called a dear friend of mine, one that could give me some good information on diabetes, then another for directions. I finally found my swimmer lying in a hospital bed on the 14th floor...room 1435.

When I walked in, Sudoku book and a goofy pen in hand, I had a plan for my man Dan: Laugh, talk shop, and then show him that the lessons he learned through swimming were being tested right here, right now.

I was fortunate enough to sit with his parents and listen as doctors and dieticians delivered a barrage of information. We all asked questions, trying to wrap our minds around the depth of this unfair diagnosis. Unfair. That's what it was. If I could, I would have reached into his body and ripped it out...everyone was thinking the same thing.

We talked about the Olympic swimmer Gary Hall, Jr., and how he has diabetes. We looked through the Regional psych sheet, and talked about Sectionals. We discussed the lessons of swimming applicable to this scenario. And then I tried not to look while he gave himself his first injection.

And yet, through all of this, he was calm, not panicked. What? Could this be right? I watched a little more. He's rocked that's for sure, but he was unbelievably calm. My mind did a back flip! Are you kidding me? Here he is, learning how to cope with an unexpected, life-long disease...yet he's not crying, he's not shouting, he's not blaming anyone, he's not arguing; He wasn't looking for a way out; he was looking for a way through!

I smiled all the way home from the hospital. What a remarkable young man! Put through an emotional gauntlet and still, he did not back down. My man Dan...he solved the riddle! Right there in that hospital room, under the most unlikely of circumstances, he solved it. What's going to happen? I think I know...and so does he.