**2018 All Star/Zone Task Force**

**Statement & Recommendations**

**Re: 10U Athlete Inclusion**

**on the Western Zone Age Group Team**

Background:

After the 2002 Zone Meet, Oregon Swimming made the decision to remove 10U athletes from the team that competes each summer at the Western Zone Age Group (WZAG) Championships. This decision was made following the presentation of information by a USA Swimming sports development specialist, which outlined the negative effects of early sport specialization and high-level competition on young athletes. These effects included excessive adult performance expectations (both coach and parental); negative athlete self-image as the result of excessive adult performance expectations; and a significant correlation between early high-level competitive success and a lack of longevity in competitive participation (“burn-out”).

At the time, Oregon Swimming was the only Western Zone LSC to make this decision. In 2018, Oregon Swimming continues to be the only LSC that does not include 10U athletes at the WZAG meet each year. This Task Force was formed to re-examine the decision made 2002 and to make a recommendation to the OSI Board of Directors regarding 10U athlete participation at this level of competition, moving forward. The members of this Task Force consisted of current and former Age Group Zone Coaches, including Head Coaches with previous experience coaching 10U athletes as part of the Zone Team; a Zone Team Manager; several athletes who have competed at the WZAG meet; and several coaches with no previous WZAG experience.

**After considerable discussion, the Task Force has the following statement and recommendations to make to the OSI Board of Directors:**

The All Star/Zone Task Force values the mission of Oregon Swimming, *To build and promote the sport of competitive swimming for the benefit of all swimmers to achieve their maximum potential,* and recognizes the importance of supporting Oregon athletes by ensuring access to competitive swimming environments to provide them with the opportunity to achieve their maximum potential.

The Task Force also recognizes that an athlete’s individual success will not be the same at every age and level of competition and believes that competitive swimming opportunities supported by Oregon Swimming need to be evaluated with this understanding in mind.

In specifically addressing the inclusion of 10U athletes on the WZAG team, three primary factors were considered at length:

1. 10U athletes and their families, in general, are new to the sport of swimming and should be encouraged to take a long-term approach to their involvement. The focus at this stage should be on enjoyment of the sport, the fundamentals of stroke technique, and other foundational aspects of conditioning, such as nutrition and hydration. Additionally, 10U athletes should be encouraged to be multi-sport athletes, avoiding early specialization and over-training that can lead to injury, negative self-image, and early exit from the sport.
2. The acknowledged benefits of the WZAG team experience, including team travel and swimming in a high-level competitive environment, are more appropriately experienced by 10U athletes within the structure and support of their individual team environments and coaching philosophies. The variables that can contribute to a negative WZAG team experience, such as the length of travel and lack of familiarity with teammates and coaches, can be avoided by 10U athletes if they are introduced to these aspects of competition as deemed appropriate by their individual team’s coaching staff, over shorter periods of time, and with the support of family and teammates.
3. The current structure of Oregon Swimming 10U Championships (2 half-day, timed-final sessions) supports the philosophical statements made in points #1 & #2 regarding the focus and training levels of 10U athletes. While the overall structure of the Oregon Championship Meets is another discussion entirely, the Task Force did discuss the addition of a prelims/finals aspect in some form to the 10U Championship Meets. It was felt that the addition of this aspect of competition was thought to be more beneficial in preparing these athletes to compete as 11 year-olds at the LSC level, rather than as 10U athletes at the WZAG meet.

The Task Force does acknowledge that, in any given year, there are likely to be some 10U athletes who possess the combination of personal and athletic maturity to successfully handle the pressures of a week-long team travel meet, in addition to swimming in a high-level competitive atmosphere. However, this Task Force also agrees that, for the vast majority of Oregon 10U athletes and their families, the structure of the week-long WZAG meet, and the selection process leading up to becoming a member of the WZAG team, are not positive, age-appropriate competitive experiences. It is not in line with the Oregon Swimming Mission Statement to support a competitive swimming experience that is in direct contradiction to recognized best practices for 10U athletes.

*Therefore, this Task Force does not recommend the 10U athletes be included as members of the Oregon WZAG Team.*

That said, this Task Force recognizes the importance of acknowledging the competitive achievements of Oregon’s 10U athletes, beyond that of the annual Top 5 Awards, and the current OSI Championship Meets. This additional recognition is afforded to 11-14 year-old athletes through the All Star and AG Zone Meet Teams, and to 15&O athletes through the Senior Training Trip, and this Task Force believes a similar opportunity that is in line with best practices should be available to 10U athletes.

*Therefore, this Task Forces recommends the creation of an invitation-only, Oregon Age Group Training Camp, that includes 10 year-old athletes, with the following suggested structure (final details TBD):*

1. A one-day camp, to be held late April/early May, for selected 10-14 year-old athletes. Suggested location: Corvallis Aquatic Center, because of central location, availability, and facility rental rates.
2. Camp size - 80 athletes: Top 8 of each age group (10, 11, 12, 13, 14), girls and boys.
3. Camp participation would be by invitation only, to the Top 8 athletes of the age groups designated in #2, above. Top 8 designation would be as determined by points scored (High Point rankings) at the OSI 10U and 11-14 Short Course AG Championship Meets, in February (10U meet would be scored retro-actively in order to determine High Point Athletes).
4. Athletes would have to confirm attendance at Select Camp by early March; if invited athletes do not confirm, then the invitation would be extended to the 9th (10th, 11th, etc) athlete in that age group, until there are eight (8) confirmed athletes for each age group.
5. Coaching staff would total 10 coaches, one for each age group (girls and boys), to include the current ASZ Coaching Staff (5 coaches) plus five (5) additionally invited Oregon coaches.
6. In addition to the coaching staff, special presenters would be selected, to include a National Team and/or Olympic Team Athlete and Coach (as available).
7. Overall structure to the camp would be early morning swim clinics / late morning workshops / lunch / early afternoon workshops / late afternoon swim clinics (suggested format).
8. Swim Clinics and Workshops would mirror those offered at Western Zone and National Team Select Camps.
9. Responsibility for planning & execution of Select Camp TBD, but to include the ASZ Head Coach and Team Manager.
10. Financial support to be a combination of funding from OSI (amount TBD) plus athlete fee.

Note:

The Select Camp idea was first considered last spring (2018) as a possibility; at that time it was determined that all costs (facility, guest speakers, food and camp t-shirt) could be covered by an athlete fee of approximately $75.00 - $100.00 per athlete ($6,000 - $10,000 budget). Oregon Swimming can consider how best to support this opportunity financially, given this financial estimate.

Decision on the Select Camp would need to be made ASAP, in order to effectively execute a successful opportunity in April/May 2019.

Respectfully Submitted,

The All Star/Zone Task Force

December 2018