

Coaches' Connection - Coach Chad Englehart

We may think we know our Splash Club coaches, but through this new series, we'll get a little more insight into where they came from, why they coach, and what they're trying to accomplish with our swimmers. First up in this series, Head Coach and Chad Englehart....

Formative Swim Career:

Chad Englehart grew up in Fort Wayne, Indiana, as an older brother to two sisters. His parents introduced him to swimming when he was six years old as a way to get him engaged in an activity and focus his energy. Success in the pool came naturally (and quickly) for him. He was a local 10 & under swimming sensation - regularly competing for city breaststroke championships. He wasn't a particularly skilled swimmer at the time, but he was full of energy and highly competitive. That said, his swimming career was not a straight shot to the top. His success stalled when his growth plateaued for several years in middle school. As his peers began to grow around him, Chad went from the big fish to a mediocre athlete. Having lost his way, he was often caught goofing around during practice. His family also moved to Decatur, Illinois during his 6th grade year, contributing to his middle school struggles.

Fortunately, during his freshman year and the summer following, he had a growth spurt - growing 8 inches and gaining 40 pounds. Shortly after that growth spurt, things began to come together for Chad and his swim career. He moved into the practice group led by his club's engaging head coach and Chad's passion and competitive drive were reignited. By the end of his sophomore year, Chad achieved his first junior national cut in the 100 breaststroke. That success motivated him to recommit to the sport. He would often come early to practice to watch the college kids swim. While he waited for his practice to start, he would run stairs and do core exercises. He took pride in his physical appearance and he reaped the rewards of his hard work in the pool. By his junior and senior years of high school, Chad had several junior national cuts and was being recruited by colleges and universities across the country. Kansas University had something that caught Chad's eye. He turned down scholarship offers from other schools to walk on to the KU swim team.

Coming off of a successful high school swim career, he joined KU with high expectations for himself and ended up falling a bit flat. He was distracted, made some poor choices, had some minor injuries and let the pressure of collegiate swimming get the best of him. That all came to a head during his junior year when he suffered a devastating injury to his ankle while playing basketball with friends. The injury put him on crutches for ten weeks and prevented him from swimming breaststroke for months. By the conference meet, Chad was not surprised to be picked last for the conference team. However, with the pressure off, he surprised everyone (including himself) by winning his first conference title. He would go on to win a consecutive conference title the following year. He credits this unexpected success to lowering expectations for himself, overcoming adversity, and enjoying swimming again.

Academically, Chad began his time at KU with a plan to follow in his father and grandfather's footsteps and become a mechanical engineer, but with opportunities to coach summer leagues and high school swim teams, he couldn't deny that coaching and teaching were his passions.

He graduated from KU with an education degree in chemistry and physics - prepared to teach middle and high school science. Immediately out of college, he was hired as the swim coach and student teacher for an Indiana high school. He moved home to Fort Wayne, Indiana to live with his parents while working three jobs. Chad would get up at 11pm and make tubing for engines until 6am, then head to the pool to coach morning swim practice for his high school students, transition to his student teaching job at the high school for the school day, and wrap up his day in the afternoon coaching a second high school practice. He would get minimal sleep and wake up at 11pm to do it all again.

Chad credits his dad with instilling his work ethic in him. Mr. Englehart taught Chad respect and responsibility, expecting him to pull his own weight while living under his roof that first year after college. And that is exactly what Chad did. Despite having three jobs, his affinity for one was apparent, and his success coaching both the girls and boys teams who were placing in the regional championships was getting him noticed. So when a new pool was built in an affluent Indiana suburb, and the community was interested in starting a club from scratch, they reached out to Chad. Over the twenty years he served as head coach of that club, he grew the program to sustain 250 athletes and 13 staff. His boys team won 19 consecutive sectional titles and his girls team and boys teams finished in the state's top 10 teams every year.

His Role with Splash Club

Fortunately for Bartlesville, when the Bartlesville Splash Club began its national search for a new head coach in 2014, Chad was looking for a new challenge and his friends at USA Swimming brought the Bartlesville opportunity to his attention. At the time, the position was structured with the Splash Club Head Coach as a P66 employee - receiving benefits unique to most coaching positions. That package helped make the opportunity especially attractive to Chad.

Chad was quick to clarify that swim coaching involves a lot more than some might imagine. Only about 30% of what he does is truly coaching. As the Head Coach and Executive Director of Splash Club, Chad spends the other 70% of his time on administrative tasks and club management: strategic planning to maintain a healthy club, communicating with parents, building relationships with coaches and administrators at the state and national levels, and mentoring his staff. Although he always strives for more balance between his work and home lives, during weeks where Splash Club hosts meets, he can easily spend 80-90 hours at the pool. He also plays influential roles on various swimming boards and associations. He's a member of the Oklahoma Coaches Association Swim Committee, the Senior Vice Chairman of Oklahoma Swimming, a representative on the USA Swimming National Governance Council, and serves on various other swim-related committees. His involvement on the national, state, and local levels reflects positively on Splash Club.

Coaching Style

Grateful to have found his passion, Chad embraces his role as a coach. Because of the impact his coaches had on him as a young swimmer, he understands that if he does his job well, he can make a significant and positive contribution to developing the next generation. He loves challenging his swimmers and seeing their growth, while helping them avoid some of the pit falls he experienced as a teen.

His coaching philosophy is centered around building strong leaders. He regularly highlights the life lessons his swimmers experience in the pool - supporting them as they navigate challenges and teaching them to be comfortable when faced with adversity. Chad wants his swimmers to learn how to handle those difficult moments in a positive way. He describes the pool and competition as merely the vehicle to build good students and teens, who end up being valuable parents, spouses, and community leaders. He recognizes the success he's trying to create in his swimmers when those swimmers are in their 20's and 30's.

As any of his National Group swimmers will tell you, Coach Chad is big on respect and has high expectations for his team. He requires punctuality and expects all of his swimmers to do what is asked of them. His demands have a purpose - they foster a sense of community. All of his swimmers go through the same challenges and meet the same expectations. They grow together through the shared struggles and sacrifices. This leads to a team full of swimmers who respect one another and a team equipped to handle challenges. That's the objective.

One of the hardest things Chad has had to adapt to over the years is the increased speed with which we all live. With parents (and swimmers) busier than ever, it is a challenge to build meaningful relationships. He values face to face communication, but there's not a lot of time for that in today's world. Those who know him well, refer to him as a big labrador: during his first impression or two, he might appear loud, high energy, and playful, but once you invest in building a relationship with him and getting to know him better, you'll recognize how incredibly loyal and supportive he can be. Without taking time to build a relationship with Coach Chad, many might miss the chance to understand who he is and see the dedication he has to this sport.

Hopefully, this Coaches Connection shed a little light on the real Coach Chad. For more insight, we encourage you to reach out to him and schedule a visit.