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## Coach McKeever

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## Selection and recruitment: finding the right fit

When recruiting and selecting swimmers, McKeever and Cunnane spend a lot of time trying to understand who the swimmer is, her family, and background. 'We have to be a protector of the program and pick a swimmer who is the right fit,' states McKeever. 'I would rather pick a slower swimmer who is a good fit for our culture than a faster swimmer who has the wrong personality or low growth potential,' says McKeever.

To determine fit, they focus on how the swimmers interact with their parents, how much direction the athlete needs, and whether they are on time. 'A red flag for us can be the swimmer constantly texting while on a home visit (not genuinely interested in the team) or the parent filling out all of the information on a form (not self-sufficient),' says Cunnane.

They want the athletes to be their own problem solvers and figure things out rather than panicking or relying on their parents. They don't want a swimmer who requires more parenting and they don't want to spend a lot of time communicating with parents. 'If they have been coddled by their parents, then they think the rules don't apply to them,' explains McKeever. 'The athletes need to understand there are certain parameters that are non-negotiable such as when to go home during school breaks.'

McKeever and Cunnane ask the recruits difficult questions to determine their fit, such as what they will bring to the program, what they think their current coach would miss about them most when they leave for college, and their greatest strength and weakness. They look for independent, smart, and hardworking athletes who have good self-insight, want to learn, and are willing to grow as people.

'They need to have some understanding of what they can do to improve,' says McKeever. They tell the swimmers about the challenges of the program and are very clear about their expectations for them as a student athlete, such as having great grades, making positive choices about what to eat and when to go to bed, and acting in a way that reflects positively on the team and university. They take the recruits to all of the places they would need to know, and don't hide limiting factors such as the facilities and the challenges surrounding an urban environment.

McKeever also does not make any promises to the swimmers regarding their role on the team. 'They will not guarantee a relay spot or to swim at the Pac 12 conference,' states Caitlin Leverenz, Senior Co-Captain and 2012 Olympian. 'They will not tell you that you will make an Olympic team, but won't ever tell you that you can't. Those who need to hear that they will make the Olympics won't be coming here. They will only guarantee to push you in the right direction.'

McKeever and Cunnane only sell the school once the recruits make it through the 'hurdles' of team fit. 'Our reputation attracts a particular type of person,' says McKeever. 'We want to make sure that the school environment will bring out the best in them. Cal is unique in that most programs have men and women working out together. Having a women-only team can factor into a recruit's decision to join Cal. Some women are afraid that there will be too much drama with women only.'

McKeever is also not afraid to remove swimmers from the program if it becomes apparent that they are not a good fit. McKeever has suspended some swimmers and taken away scholarships from others. Last year she had 10 in her freshman class and now she has only 7 going into their sophomore year. 'They thought they were really good and didn't respond well to upperclassmen trying to help them,' says McKeever. 'Some of the girls had known each other before and they were

not allowing each other to reinvent themselves.' The parents also contributed to the problem by supporting the swimmers' behaviors.

'Adjusting to the program from a club team can be a real challenge,' explains Leverenz. 'Coming into the team, I thought I was a lot better than I was. A lot of kids feel that way. On their club team, they were a star and the coach did everything for them. Here there are no stars and no one person is the center of attention that the program revolves around. This can be difficult for some. It took me about a year to fully adjust.' At times, McKeever has hired a life coach to help some of the swimmer's adjust to the program.