

Getting into the Swim of Things With H2O Academy

by

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Kaley Maksymyk and Krista Morden have often been mistaken for sisters. Aside from their physical resemblance, the two share a strong bond for swimming. They met while swimming more than 15 years ago, competed and coached together. Krista says, “Between us we have over 30 years’ experience in sport.”

“We grew up at the pool together. We went through Provincials, Nationals and qualified for International Competition as elite synchronized swimmers,” adds Kaley.

Even when they retired from sport, they continued to work together as coaches. In 2011 they coached the Manitoba Synchro Team in the Canada Winter Games in Nova Scotia and increased their standings. Krista says, “We were the youngest coaching team there. We kept getting mistaken for athletes.”

Their coaching experience taught them that something was missing in the athlete’s training. Kaley says, “We realized that nothing existed that created technical balance programing. We spoke with other local coaches in aquatic sports and agreed that lot of athletes needed to improve their basic technical skills.”

“We think that all young kids should be equipped with the basic skills at a young age before they choose to specialize in a sport. They’ll be prepared to excel in whatever sport they choose whether it’s speed swimming, diving, synchro or water polo,” Krista says. “Or if they don’t want to join aquatic sports, at least they’ll be comfortable swimming at the lake and their parents won’t have to worry about them. It is a life skill and once you learn it you won’t forget.”

These were the thoughts that inspired Kaley and Krista to develop the H2O Aquatic Academy. H2O takes children as early as six months of age. “Babies are very comfortable in the water, most of them still have the diving reflex, so they will be able to hold their breath underwater,” Krista says. “It is very similar to the environment in the womb, so babies are very natural in the water.”

“We thought about what skills an eight to 12 year old would need to be prepared to enter the aquatic sports, then worked backwards to six months, and determined what skills they would need at each stage,” Kaley says.

One of the chief concepts of H2O is based on physical literacy, a new concept in developing a healthy lifestyle. Krista and Kaley have worked with leading expert, Dr. Dean Kriellaars to build it into their program. Kaley says, “The idea is that there are developmental stages throughout your lifespan and you need to be developing the basic skills and confidence before you specialize.”

They emphasize two main things, technique and fun. H2O uses a number of techniques to help with both of these features. They have an underwater sound system, flippers to help the kids get their feet into proper swim position and shark like swim fins. Krista says, “It makes it more fun and they can go fast in the water, so it builds their confidence.”

H2O’s motto is ‘Physical Skills + Confidence + Motivation + Opportunities = Aquatic Literacy’. Kaley explains it like this, “It’s more than just being able to play a sport or be able to swim. Having aquatic and physical literacy is about confidence. A lot of reasons why people stop participating in physical activities as they get older is because they lack the confidence. The more versatile you are, the more opportunities that you get to practice, the more skills you learn, it builds that confidence and creates the gateway to active participation.”

What makes H2O different is that, unlike some swimming lessons where a child may swim for a few minutes and stand around waiting for another turn, their students are kept busy in and out of the water, in a variety of activities, building total physical literacy, not just swimming skills. Although they would prefer to start with children around six months of age, they have programs for all ages up to 12 years old.

H2O does not have a pass/fail system, they give children who graduate a portfolio that maps their progress. Kaley says, “There is a lot of pressure placed on the achievement of getting your ‘badge’ so we got rid of that. We want parents and kids to know ‘Johnny is really good at kicking and could work more on his breath control’ so the parents can take a more active role in helping their child improve and helps to build confidence.”

H2O is based out of Krista’s home/office in Tuxedo, but at this time the lessons take place at the Winnipeg Winter Club. Lessons currently take place two days a

week, but they will add more classes and days in future sessions. To find out more about the H2O Aquatic Academy, check out their website at www.h2oacademy.ca or on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.