



Coach gives lessons in life

By Paul Haigh

IT IS just after 6am and Justin Rothwell is blowing the whistle and speaking with the squad swimmers as they do warm-up laps at the Whitlam Leisure Centre's indoor pool.

Bleary-eyed swimmers soak in the information, then the whistle blows again and, in groups, they begin the morning training sessions.

One-time Olympic swim aspirant and now full-time coach Rothwell, 32, of Macquarie Links, runs the Justin Rothwell Swim Academy at Liverpool's Whitlam Centre and also at Ashfield and Guildford pools.

Rothwell is a believer in the power of the mind and the strength the athlete gains from positive thinking. He plans to write a book about setting goals and how to implement goals in life.

Rothwell admits he lives and breathes swimming when he is at training with the swimmers.

Away from swimming, his life is centred on family, and his love for wife Angela and son Harrison, 2, the light of his world.

At training Rothwell stands, stopwatch in hand, whistle hanging from his neck, watching the swimmers gliding through the water.

Then he scurries over to his whiteboard to scribble down information and record it.

He is a relaxed, laid-back coach, who believes in "communicating" with people – speaking with them, not down to them.

"Communication is the key," he said. "There is the technical side of coaching, which is important, but as a coach you must learn to speak with the person and also listen."

"I would say communication is listening, I live by this rule."

The articulate Rothwell, who is a prominent member of the NSW Swimming Coaches Association, said he loved the challenge of helping people achieve their goals.

"To me, seeing kids improve from average swimmers to the best they can be gives me the most satisfaction," Rothwell said.

"My wife, Angela, and the entire group of coaches work so hard, we're all a team and we work with the swimmers. We're like one big family."

Most mornings and five afternoons a week his squad of more than 80 swimmers are put through their paces in the pool.



A coach's day: Justin Rothwell doing the group tutoring, above; individual teaching, top left and right; and coaching staff member Jacqui Stewart, working with young swimmers, above right.

Each swimmer has programs tailored for their specific needs.

Rothwell maps out training programs with his coaching staff and gives swimmers the latest diet and nutritional information.

He uses video for stroke correction and often attends coaching seminars and advanced courses to update his knowledge.

He works six days a week – Sunday is the rest day away from swimming.

"You need to clear your head from the coaching and running the business," Rothwell said.

"Angela and my family give me

the balance, the perspective and stability in my life.

"I tell all the swimmers that family is number one, schooling is number two, then swimming.

"My family are fantastic, I love them dearly and they mean the world to me.

"I love coming home and watching *Dora the Explorer*, *Bob the Builder* and dancing with Harrison and Angela, to the music of the Wiggles."

Rothwell said swim coaching and being a career mentor were the furthest things from his mind as a young man.

"I went to university to study accounting and worked as an accountant for a few years and coached part-time," he said.

"Nothing against accounting but it was my passion, swimming, and I really love coaching, so accounting had to go."

Rothwell believes in loyalty and friendship and that a person's word is his or her bond.

Former coaches Bob McEvoy and Alan Thompson, who is now the Australian Olympic head coach, have shaped these principles in Rothwell's life.

"Bob McEvoy and his wife, taught



me how to swim and I was fortunate enough to win medals at Australian national age titles," Rothwell said.

He trialled for the Australian team for the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. He didn't get to Spain but the experience shaped his attitude towards life and the importance of hard work and discipline as the golden rules to follow.

"I was lucky to have Bob McEvoy and Alan Thompson as mentors," he said.

He said coaching and developing the swim skills of his squad was more important to him than seeing them winning medals and breaking records.

"Obviously, swimming is a tough sport, but as a former swimmer I can understand what they are going through," he said.

"One interesting statistic is that 77 per cent of the swimmers who have come through our programs have gone to university and been very successful when they left school.

"I believe it is the discipline, time management and the goal-setting they had as swimmers which has helped them significantly in life.

"Goals are something of the art of living. We can plan for our future and in doing so we create the portrait of life."

Rothwell said swim coaching had evolved "light years" since he began in the sport.

"Swim coaching has changed and developed incredibly. You only have to look at how the costumes have changed, for a start," he said.

"Nowadays, as coaches we have access to above water and underwater video cameras, we have lactate testing, we examine stroke rate and stroke length.

"I believe we are on the cutting edge in goal-setting and visualisation. Nutrition is so important, especially with everyone leading busy lives.

"Coaching has certainly advanced. It has become more scientific."