

Coaches Committee Quarterly

United States
Masters
Swimming



Fall 2001

It is sometimes difficult for Masters swimmers to slow down and take the time to work on technique. How do you integrate stroke technique into your workouts while still keeping the yardage and swimmers' heart rates at an acceptable level?

What works especially well for my swimmers (CRUZ) is that during the Fall, Winter, and Spring, I offer a special series of Saturday morning workshops/clinics, before our regular Saturday session, that focus specifically on a stroke or skill. While the drills may be similar or the same as those used for weekday warm-ups, the CRUZ-ers can focus their attention on the drills for a much longer period of time. The CRUZ-ers find that, although they do no fast swimming, they still get a challenging workout, they get better at swimming, and they will then put more effort into the drills during their weekday warm-ups, further improving their swimming.

These clinics have helped a lot to build interest in our program. Over a 3-6 month time period, comments I've received from regular attendees at the clinics include "I've never done a 100 that fast before," or "I swam that set on a faster interval than ever before," or "I'm going to attend the next open water swim."

*Joel Wilson
Santa Cruz Masters, CA*

One example of a good aerobic cycle set that we do that includes drill: 1 x 200 @ 3:30 All Catchup drill, then 3 x 100 @ 1:40 Swim Free Descend 1>3, repeat cycle 4 times through.

Note: you could substitute the fist drill on the 200 if you wanted but keep the interval a little shorter than a normal drill interval, that will get the swimmers going a little faster than normal. On occasion it is fun to try and swim drills fast. Our team enjoys this set, you should try it too.

*Kris Houchens
Indy SwimFit*

First of all, with the UCSD Masters Swimming Program, we start telling the swimmers in August, that we will be cutting down on the intensity level of workouts during the upcoming Stroke Development Season (Oct-Dec). We work on the mechanics of all four competitive strokes, while we maintain our aerobic base training. If they hear that it's coming, then it's not too much of a shock. So, communication with your swimmers on

your intentions is primary.

During the stroke development season, three days a week we emphasize stroke drills that progress through each stroke, from body position in the water to combined, full stroke swimming. We always start with the basic body position in the water, and slowly add various components to the stroke to complete the journey.

The other days we 'slide' through various drills on the way to a longer main set that gives them the feeling of staying in shape. Major consideration is always given to proper stroke technique for every swimmer.

Once the swimmers learn the drills swimming slowly, we incorporate them into the workout at a faster pace. This helps the muscles 'remember' what they need to do and how to do it at normal swimming speed. Intervals need a slight adjustment, but overall, the swimmers get a pretty good workout.

Stay in tune with your swimmers, and coach pro-actively during every phase of stroke development.

*Sickie
UCSD Masters Swimming, San Diego*

The way I work in technique stuff is during the warm up and right after the warm up. Usually the warm up period will last anywhere from 10-20 minutes and that's a great time to roam the deck helping people out as they are just getting started. I stop the entire warm up period at a certain point and make a few announcements, and then go into a technique session for not longer than 10 minutes. The technique concepts which are reviewed in the technique session are then carried into the main set which is where we get some serious yardage going and the heart rate elevated.

*Doug Garcia
WSU Masters, Albion, WA*

Our group approaches the season with a kickoff "Fall Festival." The festival is surrounding a coach mentor clinic that has over the years been very successful. It starts with a coaching lecture series Fri. night and begins each day with lectures to the coaches followed by workouts, clinics and video for swimmers wherein we work and apply drills.

We have been so successful that we usually have 2-3 national coaches on deck. This year the clinic attracted 37 coaches and 72 swimmers. There is a party on Sat. night that is catered with live entertainment, games, rafting, and kayaking that we host at our house. This attracted ~ 140 this year.

Sometime the following week I have a planning session for our team coaches, wherein we work out our goals and break down the season for the year. Each week has a theme that will feature drills appropriate to the theme. By breaking it down the yardage is not affected and there is not too much to absorb at once. I have found that if you try to introduce too many drills the concentration and the yardage both are challenged.

*Jim Miller M.D.
Virginia Masters Swim Team*

I am constantly reminding my swimmers that in order of importance (as I see it) for them to reach personal goals as to fast swimming, they must strive to improve their technique, get stronger in the water, and get into swim shape. Since most are not really tired at the beginning of the training session, it is the perfect time for them to become extra mindful of the most efficient way to move through water...better known as technique. Once this is done, it is up to the individual swimmer and his motivation to improve, to institute correct form even when fatigue and pain set in.

Every practice starts off with a set of 8x25 yard swims where I stress the importance of streamlining, the correct breakout to the surface, good, efficient stroking, and the correct finishes per stroke. Then we progress to 4x50's where turns are added to the above. All these are swum within ease time intervals so all my people can benefit. Then we move up to 75's, first 4 x free/stroke/free, then 4x stroke/free/stroke. Again within an interval that is doable for all. If the slower swimmers still cannot complete the swims within the interval, they must use fins to make the time. All this is within the warm-up/pre-main set grouping. It is here that I stress over and over the importance of proper technique as relating to body position, feel for the water, and distance-per-stroke.

*Ed Nessel
Garden State Masters, Edison, NJ*

I send e-mails out that go over drills we use or forward some technique article I have found on the web. I stick with 2-4 drills on each stroke at the most. I like finding ones that hit multiple stroke issues. For example doing catch-up combined with finger-tip drag to work on extension, correct position on the breath and high elbows.

*Angie Friday
Blue Tide Aquatics Masters, Texas*

When I teach technique at the team level, I always make a point not to do too much talking. I concentrate on one or two specific drills or directions and repeat them enough to get the idea locked into the swimmers' brains so they can continue improving their technique when the drills are done. I keep the swimmers moving and working hard through the drill work because most Masters swimmers I've dealt with are there to keep the heart rate and yardage up.

As an example I may have the team do 4 x 100 with 12 underwater kicks during each streamlined push-off. These four swims may be descending on a fairly tough send-off. I'll give some streamlining tips (thumb lock, shoulders behind ears, push through to the toes) which takes about one minute, then send them on their merry way. I'll comment individually throughout the set when needed but will not keep them from their send-off. I think this approach has three good results. The heart rate/yardage thing is retained, the swimmers are not bogged down with a lot of words and the techniques they've learned are more easily incorporated into their regimen.

*John Underbrink
Dallas Aquatic Masters*

One way to persuade masters swimmers to pursue regular technical work is to convince them of the following- Drills will make you faster and more efficient swimmers in the long run, and proper technique will help avoid injuries. Easy speed is the key to top performances, and injury free training will allow you to build a reliable base.

*Lee Wanie
Olympic Club, San Francisco*

I do two things that have proven very effective. First, I implore the lane leader to set the pace and work on technique, which means they must slow down the lane. The lane leader must be confident enough to allow swimmers to swim on his/her heels without speeding up. The leader sets the pace and everyone must respect the pace. Passing when we're only going 85-90% effort is unacceptable. They get it. I hate when the leader gets passed on a moderate 400 (85% effort) and then has to re-pass the new leader who can't hold the pace or can't speed up and take it to a higher level when the set calls for that. I tell the rest of the lane not to try to force the pace in the beginning of the set, but to try to keep up with it at the end. Changing speeds is critical to swimming faster. Sometimes you have to

slow down to speed up.

The other thing I do to slow swimmers down and ensure that they are maintaining good technique is to make them count their strokes from time to time. I will often make them swim a test 50 using their best, long stroke (without exaggerating) and have them count their strokes per lap. Then, during the following set (usually 400's or 200's) I will ask them to try to maintain that stroke count and limit them to one more stroke per lap (ie, if a swimmer does 16 strokes per lap on their 50, I will ask them to try to maintain 16 on the 400's or 200's and limit them to 17 strokes per lap).

*Brian Robinson
YWCA Masters, New York*

I use drills in between their distances sets. I am constantly doing stroke correction. While they are waiting for the clock I make comments on what they should be thinking about on this round. Constant reminders during the sets, keeps them thinking about their strokes, turns and push-offs.

*Carol Macpherson
Rinconada Masters, Palo Alto, CA*

My swimmers *expect* there to be specific technique foci involved in every practice activity. Naturally, when it's time for extreme effort, that's what matters, but otherwise we're developing the habits we'll "revert to" when it's time to rock.

One time I announced the warm-up as "500 free" and they brought me a chair, coffee and a patio umbrella; aren't swimmers funny?

As a swimmer I hated "structured workouts" and as a coach I'm determined to teach and interact with the swimmers. Basic instruction involves at least a hundred different generic drills and more "as necessary." We cycle through all old material in less supervised sets, like warm-up and recovery, and introduce new stuff as well as review the old in guided sessions.

Technique work is an easy sell once swimmers see it makes a huge difference. It takes, however, a concerted effort behind sound planning to get it done.

Tom Murphy, Retired

We like to incorporate our drill/stroke work near the beginning of each workout. After a good warm-up and kick set, we usually throw on fins. This allows swimmers to focus on their stroke while maintaining good body position without much effort from their legs.

Drill sets are broken into 100's in order to allow swimmers a small rest to refocus their thoughts on their stroke and give the coach the opportunity to give feedback to the swimmer. Drills take less than 10 minutes and total approx. 400 meters.

*Coach Susan Ingraham
Team Texas-San Antonio*

What solution(s) do you provide to your swimmers to correct the following common stroke deficiencies:

**Freestyle:
Dropped Elbow at the catch**

(a) Try to flatten out the stroke as over rotating can assist in the "dropped elbow" and (b) have them change the angle of their hand at top of their stroke from their fingertips pointing to the end of the pool, to having their fingertips extending toward the bottom of the pool at an angle. They should be able to feel their arm pit hollowed out with their arm extended - if they point their fingertips toward the end of the pool, they won't be able to have a hollowed out arm pit.

Great drills: one arm, stiff wrist and flex wrist drills. These last two drills are similar to fingertip drag, but you keep the waterline on the recovery at the mid-forearm, and be sure to push the elbows past the head without changing the angle of the hand/forearm - thereby not allowing the elbow to drop. Stiff wrist: keep your wrist ridged through the recovery. Flex wrist: let the water push your hand back during the recovery.

*Janet Renner
Maui Masters, Hawaii*

Sculling with hands under the body and high elbows. Hand paddles help show this as well. I like to have use paddles with a breathing pattern that allows them to lengthen and feel when their strokes are most efficient.

Angie Friday

Elbow drop on freestyle: Always keep the finger tips below the elbow. Imagine reaching over a large oak barrel of your favorite wine, creating a wide open armpit, leading to a high elbow and fingertips anchored perpendicular to the direction of travel. This type of catch will allow use of the latissimus and generate a strong pull.

Lee Wanie

Work on breaststroke pull drill to establish a proper catch with a high elbow.

Fist freestyle drills where I emphasize distance per stroke and using the entire forearm. If they drop their elbows during this drill, they'll really go nowhere.

Brian Robinson

I stress keeping the elbow above the hand all the way through the stroke. Catch-up stroke is another drill to keep the elbow up and pulling with a bent elbow through the front of the stroke into an extension at the end of the stroke and a lift from the elbow to come out of the water.

Carol Macpherson

Frankenstein hesitation variation: from streamline position on side, begin switch with

arms straight, to about 10 degrees (trying to get a good little skull), then return to streamline, repeat, on third iteration, at previous reversal point, break elbows and continue stroke through to the other side, emphasizing distance, smoothness, and body control(sishkebab); the 180 degree rotation is easier with early high catch, besides, those legs get tired, and the focus of the drill is on the critical moment.

Tom Murphy

Backstroke: Hips riding too low

I focus on balance and head positioning. To improve balance, I ask the swimmer to use the nape of their neck as their balance point. While on their back, I have them press the nape of their neck down slightly towards the bottom of the pool. It helps if they round their shoulders slightly. To improve head position, I have them tuck their head to make a double chin, while maintaining the pressure on the nape of their neck.

For drills, I focus on kicking with arms at the side, practicing balance; then adding rotation while maintaining balance; then adding one arm drills with equal rotation; then finishing with 5 strokes right arm only, 5 strokes left arm only, 5 alternate - always working on balance

Janet Renner

I tell them that their pelvis bones need to rotate out of the water each stroke. We do lots of rotation drills. Kicking with one arm behind their heads, body rolled on side, head facing the ceiling. This progresses to six-kick switch drill, six kick three stroke drill, etc.

Angie Friday

Swim Downhill. Press the T. Do balance drills until you can stay horizontal on the water with very little (almost no) kick.

*Bob Hopkins
Freelance Coach, Sparta, NJ*

I make my swimmers use fins to do a lot of stroke drills which stress body alignment. The fins allow for the extra motivation though the water, irrespective of ability, and are a very important part of these drills. With repeat 100's I remind them that the whole body turns side-to-side, but not the head. First 100 is nothing but kicking on the back with only the body rolling side to side; each shoulder tip must come out of the water the same; again with *no* head movement. Second 100 has them using only right arm in correct backstroke movement; the left arm stays at the side. Third 100 has the left arm catching the water while the right arm stays at the side. Fourth 100 is what I hope becomes "perfect backstroke" with all the roll side-to-side and the shoulder tips coming out of the water first,

and the head perfectly still in a head-back, chin-down position in line with the spine.

Ed Nessel

As in freestyle and other long axis strokes, the head must be inline with the rest of the body. Relax the neck, look up into the sky, and create the 'bow' of a ship with the back of the neck and shoulders. Use your peripheral vision to spot the lane lines and stay in the middle of the lane.

Lee Wanie

My technique for keeping the hips higher on Backstroke is to make sure they are pressing the "T" with the head still and looking at the ceiling (for those of us indoors). Also, make sure they point their toes when they kick and keep the knees below the surface of the water when they kick. The combination of all the above should solve the problem.

Doug Garcia

Breaststroke: Lack of propulsion from the kick

I tell them to imagine they are holding a basketball between their legs as they kick to keep their knees closer. I also emphasize the stretch at the end of each stroke cycle. One pull-3 or 2 kick drill helps with this and the old favorite 3 second glide.

When needed I ask them to tap their ankles together BEFORE they come out of their streamline position for their next stroke cycle.

Angie Friday

I concentrate on using the feet and ankles and get my swimmers to start with their feet turned way out and then to turn the feet inward at the end of the kick as if they were going to touch the bottoms of their feet together.

If a swimmer has a weak breast kick I have them try kick down and around and then lifting both feet together at the end. Have them stop the kick at the top once they have lifted. This will give them a dolphin kick going up. It is legal and does help a weak kick.

Carol Macpherson

In the breaststroke, my people know two main important facts as I interpret the stroke. First, this is the only stroke where one can only go as fast as the kick. Second, unlike the other strokes, most of the motivation through the water in breaststroke is performed by the kick.

I teach that a slow, wide kick is just that—*slow*. So I show them that they can still move a great deal of water if the heels are kept up high towards the butt but the legs are relatively narrow with a crisp, snappy kicking motion. For those who don't "get" the "ankles out" position, I take their ankles in my hands while they are holding onto the wall and physically turn the feet in the proper position so they can feel the correct way to move.

Another drill I use is to make the swimmers kick breaststroke on their backs, so they can see that proper form dictates that the knees are just at the water line, and they can try and get their heels up to touch their butts with each kick.

Ed Nessel

Butterfly: Breathing too late; head still up when the hands enter

Drills: (1) 3 kicks on the fourth kick take a stroke and breath; (2) one arm fly; (3) Porpoising: leaving arms to front until ready to come up to surface then push off bottom with feet, or kick and pull back with arms take a breath immediately when break surface bring arms over the top of the water for recovery and dive back to bottom leaving arms in front - great to do in water 4-5 feet deep

Janet Renner

Keep the head down! They shouldn't be looking at the end of the pool when breathing. Put a tennis ball under the chin and hold it there with pressure on your clavicle while swimming fly. As the arms pass the head during the recovery (forming a 90-degree angle with the body), the head should be on its way down back into the water. Try breathing to the side when you can see your arm even with your head on the recovery, start back into the glide phase by 'pressing the T' and getting the head back underwater.

Lee Wanie

Even bad breathing habits can be corrected by practicing the stroke without breathing. Butterfly is the best example. Before trying to correct a deficiency such as this I have the swimmer do a lot of no breathing butterfly over a long period of time. 25's "zero out butterfly" is my favorite set for no breathing butterfly. The swimmers do butterfly with zero breaths as far as comfortably possible, then finish the length with breaststroke. This is a great set for beginners all the way to the most experienced swimmers in a practice. Once the swimmer has perfected swimming fly without breathing then we can work on correcting this deficiency while being cautious not to allow too much butterfly at one time.

*John Underbrink
Dallas Aquatic Masters*

Tell them to make sure their head enters the water before their hands. Most swimmers get that. I also do the drill where they take 2 kicks while they glide after each butterfly stroke for a total of 4 kicks per stroke (2 during the stroke and 2 extra ones during the glide). This helps them set up each stroke properly in the correct body position and rests them so that each stroke can be a quality stroke.

Brian Robinson

USMS Coaches Committee News

Convention

The USMS Annual Convention is set for November 15-18 in Louisville. This is a rescheduling of the previous convention that was slated for September in Detroit. Our Coaches Committee will have an abbreviated, 50-minute meeting on Friday of the convention and will host the Coaches Seminar on Thursday. Speakers are Mike Collins (How to Build a Powerhouse Team), Marty Hamburger (Seasonal Planning) and Scott Rabalais (Stroke Technique Differences in Elite Swimmers). We hope to see you there!

Speedo Coach of the Year

Mel Goldstein of Indy Swimfit in Indianapolis has been named the 2001 USMS Coach of the Year. For almost two decades, he has built the Indianapolis team to roughly 400 members using several pools throughout the city. He is known for his innovative ideas for keeping swimming fun for all. He is Past President of USMS and has served in numerous other positions of leadership in USMS. Congratulations, Mel!

February OTC Camp

The next camp at the US Olympic Training Center will be held in February, 2002. A coaching application and further information may be obtained at <http://www.usms.org/coach/otccoachapp.pdf>. Please return ASAP; after Nov 1, contact Scott Rabalais at coaches@usms.org for proper application mailing address (I'm moving!).

Snoopers

The Snooper Loan Program is looking for a coordinator. Our thanks for Paul Windrath for serving in this position for the last four years. Paul reports the job only takes 20-30 hours per year, and it provides a great service to those who wish to study stroke technique with the Snooper camera. If interested, contact Scott Rabalais at coaches@usms.org.

New Zealand Coaching

If you are interested in serving as a coach to USMS swimmers at the upcoming World Championships in Christchurch, New Zealand, you may apply using the form at <http://www.usms.org/coach/worlds02coach.pdf>. Application deadline is December 1. Again, before mailing, contact Scott Rabalais at coaches@usms.org for mailing address.

Discussion Forum

The USMS Discussion Forum is a site on the USMS web site where swimmers and coaches can discuss issues pertinent to Masters swimming (and lots more, believe me!). The Coaches Forum is a great spot to discuss technique issues, answers swimmers' questions and/or start a new thread of your own. Check it out in the "Discussion Forum" section at [usms.org](http://www.usms.org). The most popular topic lately has been: How do you maintain your motivation given the "Masters Prerogative"? It had sixty responses and addresses an important topic for both Masters coaches and swimmers.

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