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THE TRAINING OF
KATIE LEDECKY

By COACH YURI SUGIYAMA

Introduction

Yuri Suguiyama is coaching in the same program that he grew up as an athlete. CUBU in the Washington DC area part of Potomac Valley Swimming and Yuri spent six years with CUBU in the last two years as the head coach at Georgetown Prep. His biggest claim to fame he told me is that he is a two-time Potomac Valley Swimming Age Group coach of the year. I think he sells himself a little bit short with that, but last night he was recognized as Potomac Valley’s Age Group swimming coach of the year. He also happened to be a finalist for the ASCA coach of the year. He also happened to be a finalist for the ASCA coach of the year, so that’s a unique double. I am not sure there is any coach that’s ever had that – that double in the same – the same year. If you watched Olympic Trials – if you watched the Olympic Games which I’m sure most of you did, one of the most inspiring, exciting races for both those meets was the women’s 800-free in which Katie Ledecky dominated both the races at Trials and at the Olympic Games and at the Olympic Games won the gold medal, breaking the American record set by the greatest distance swimmer ever, Janet Evans, at least up until now and if you’re like me, I followed a lot of the Olympic finals on Twitter because I couldn’t get the NBC mobile feed to work very well and I can remember reading, I don’t know who was tweeting it at that point, but Ledecky out under the national age group 15, 16, 400 free records set by Janet Evans in the 800-free final and just amazing guts and effort by her and I’m really looking forward to hearing Yuri tell us how that development – developmental process with Katie went, so here is Yuri Suguiyama.

Yuri Suguiyama: Thank you very much Mark. That was a much more appropriate introduction than the one I received last night, so that was nice. Thank you very much. I’m here today to talk to you all about the training of Katie Ledecky and I’d be lying to say if I wasn’t a little bit nervous about that, but I feel like if there’s one topic I know the best about right now in my life, it’s training Katie; it’s what I’ve been doing for the past five years and it’s been a long road despite the fact that we’re both relatively young, but a lot of work has gone into it and I’m looking forward to sharing with you all how we got to that point. Thank you very much to John and Guy and the rest of ASCA for inviting me to be here. It’s just a real privilege to get up here and talk to you all. Thank you for coming this morning and my hope, I think like anyone that gets up here and speaks is that you guys were able to take something home for your program that you can use, that just like Bob said last night that, somewhere in your program, there’s a 10-year-old or an 11-year-old or a 13-year-old and hopefully you can go back and be inspired to help them reach the heights that Katie did, and if not – if not what she did then at least their best because that’s what we’re all here for and I’m just well humbled to be up here and if there is proof that anybody can do it then it’s right here in me, so thank you all very much for being here and let’s get started.

I was going to talk about just the progression and what she was like as a little girl and just our practice and our training and I’ll get into that because I think it’s really important that I go over that, but before that we’ve been here for four, five days and I just figured, you know what, I’ll just tell some stories about this past year and watch some video because I don’t know about you all, but I don’t get to watch a lot of swimming video and whenever I do, it gets me really fired up so I’ll talk a little bit and we’ll watch some race video and let’s – we’ll get rowdy and then get us fired up. It was about this year – it was about this time a year ago that and
before every season for the past couple of years, Katie and I have sat down and we've gone over just kind of some goals, and I'll never forget we were sitting in a sandwich shop and yeah it was about a year ago and we were just talking about this year and you know with Katie well, you know when you go this and okay, here's where we want to be in December and okay Katie and we got to the end of the talking, I said, "okay, well what would be the ultimate goal for you this year coming up?" She was like, "Well, you know, what do you mean?" I was like, "Well its 2012, what would be the ultimate goal?" And she kind of just like, "Well, like, making the Olympic team?" She said it in this very kind of sheepish voice then I said, yeah, I said yeah. Say it again. She said make the Olympic team. Then I said, is that a goal? And she said yeah – yeah it is. And I said fine, that's the goal and I'll just keep that between you and I. I said, we will not talk about that with any other coaches or any of your teammates or even if your parents if you don't want to, but that's between you and I, and really that was probably the only time we ever really verbalized that. After that, we just started talking about the process. What do we need to do to get there? And we would talk a little bit and we would mention that a little bit throughout the year, but it wasn't so much. Let's make the Olympics, it was never, but we established that and that was the goal. I thought she could do it. She was coming off a really great summer. Last summer, she won the high-point award at summer Juniors, outstanding for she had a really great meet. She won the 400, the 800, and the 1500, and the summer before that; she had won the high-point award at the Northeastern Sectionals, recent swimming sectionals in Buffalo, New York.

So her progression has been really good and I thought, man, if this year coming up if we can just stay healthy, if I can just keep her healthy, raise her yardage a little bit, keep pressing, my gosh I think she's got a shot, I think she can do it. And so, we went through the fall, she was just great training. She was excited. She was doing great numbers. It was her freshman year of high school. She got the chance to go to the National Select Camp in Colorado Springs at the end of October and that was really her first exposure and my first exposure to Colorado Springs. We were both really impressed, and I think she did a really great job of their training. She was swimming really fast and I'll never forget Peter Clark coming up to me and saying, "other girls stumble, she's got a shot "and I'm thinking, it's really cool that at least USA Swimming is recognizing that as well. So she went to a local meet and she went 435, the 500-freestyle and she went 929, I think in the 1000, she broke two national age group records and I was, wow, it's really great. Well, go a couple more weeks and we're really pushing it and then right before – we were going to go to Nationals. We're going to go to Nationals this December, that was going to be her first exposure to national level competition.

Up until that point, it has been juniors or sectionals and so that was the plan, and she got really, really sick, I mean like 10 pounds in a week sick and she was a shell of herself and so we really had to take a step back and I remember talking to her at the time and I just kind of said, you know Katie, okay. That was a big bummer, but I'm a big believer that things happen for a reason and apparently we weren't supposed to go to that meet, so let's just get refocused here and let's just move forward and see what we can do, and as a result of that, I don't know what kind of effect that had, but in some ways, I think it almost – it saved her a little bit for the second half of that year and we were able to kind of keep – we'd kind of keep her in the back pocket and say, okay, well we got this great distance from her here, CUBU and we didn't – we weren't able to display really at the national scene in December so we just have to wait, so as a result of that, I had to take her to the Missouri Grand Prix in February. I wanted her to get the exposure of racing against some other national team athletes and a couple of them were there. There were a lot of Canadian Olympians there. They just had their trials, so it was a great experience if she got the final and on the last night, she won the 800. She went – I think she went 830, just missed breaking. She was 14 at that time and she just missed breaking the national age group record really good.

We went to the NCSA meet – club meet and we've kind of swam through that. I didn't rest her very much. That was more just fun and she – I think she swam a better 400. She was 408 and she ran out of gas a little bit on that last day. I think she went 832, 834 maybe. She still swam a good swim. That was probably – it was her most even swim. One of the things we had talked about all year was how even can you be and that really worked at the end there, but it was being even and so I was really excited about that. So we go through the spring and she – again, she was just swimming lights out and her numbers in practice were really good and every once in a while, I would walk away from the pool deck and I'd be like, wow, Katie just pushed a 445 in practice, at the end of 8000, that's pretty darn good and I would be thinking to myself, gosh, if she can just stay healthy, we can do this. We can – she can really do this, and one thing about Katie this – is that she's not a very verbal persona and she's kind of – we have a relationship where – she kind of comes to me I think more at the end of practice or at the end of meets, and she'll just kind of come up to me and she just – she kind of looks at me and it's almost like she just needs to know that I'm there and that okay that was good, and so I would try and engage her more. I would say, okay, what do you think? How was that? It was good like, Katie, you know you just went 1928 for a 2000 of a time, how was that? It was pretty good. You know, okay, so I was getting really frustrated with her. I was, you know, you have to be able to communicate because we have to work together on this.

So, I think it was back in November or December, I said okay. Here's a journal, I bought her this black and white composition and I said, okay, every single day you have to write down your wellness on a scale of 1 to 10, your nutrition, how well you sleep, how well you slept the night before and something special you did that day; and so that really helped me throughout the year as well and it was a way that she and I – and what I would do is I would take that for a week and then I would write her a page of notes. Hey, great job, you're doing really well. What's going on with your kick outs? Breaststroke, or is that legal right now? What's going on? And but – at the same time, it would allow her to communicate to me in a different way and every once in a while, I would pick up a little nugget or she would put a quote in there or she would write down these splits of what Adlington had done in Europe or what, Allison Schmitt had done or Gillian Ryan domestically, and so that really let me know that we were on the right path.

We're getting ready for Trials and about two weeks before Trials, I had all these thoughts in my head. I wanted to tell her and – but I didn't want to bug her. I didn't want to bug her the weeks before Trials so I just of kind of wanted to let her be, so we sat down about two weeks before Trials and I made a little bit of a chi-chi and I just went over everything that I felt like she needed to know and I talked about just the emotions behind Trials and anyone that's ever been there or experienced it, man that is a meet unlike any
other and there is a finality to that meet that I try to prepare her for. I tried to speak to her about it and I talked to her about what was going to be the walkout and the lights and the music and a camera in your face and so we went over that because I was like, I don’t want to be bugging her every other day with, oh, make sure you eat or oh bring your favorite power bar, so I just kind of let it be and again, she looks really good going into Trials and we got there two days before. Some people like to get there really early, I realized that. My feeling has always been it’s a long meet anyway.

I want to let her sleep in her own bed for as much as I can. The 800 listing was like the 6th or 7th day and that’s a long time and for those of you that were there, it just feels like Groundhog Day. Right? You’re just there; every day is the same day. We would sit back in the warm-up — warm down pool and it’s like a casino, right? You don’t know if it’s like 3 in the morning or 2 in the evening. You’re just, wow, what time is it here, right? So you’re just like totally out of it. So, I just didn’t want her to be there for too long, so we go there for a day and it’s all good and the other thing that we did that I thought helped was we watched a video of the Century Link Center and it was — she and I would sit down. We sat down two or three times and we just — I had it on my computer and I said, okay, here is a video tour of the Century Link Center, so she was able to visualize. Okay, what’s it like to walk out on through? Okay, this is the lower bowl, that’s where the warm-up — warm down pool is and that really helped both of us because I hadn’t been there in 2008 and obviously neither had she. She swims the prelims of the 400 on the second day and she is right beside Allison Schmitt. She has a really good race. I think she was qualified as 12th in the morning by 100 and a best time at the Olympic Trials medals. It looked like the medal. It’s — those we got to saw — see the Olympic Trials medals. It looked like something that you stick into a door to like open it up, right? It’s this huge key, right? So we get ready for — we get ready for the 200. Well, I think she was qualified as 12th or 13th. It’s a really good swim as well and semi-finals at night, great swim. She makes a late charge in her last 50, boom, 9th. Oh, not going to be able to compete in the final. You know missed it by one spot, I think a hundredth of a second and again it was like, okay, well you got third in that 400, you got 9th in the 200, what can you say to that? But it was the best time — it was the best time, Katie, you’re just one of the best time and she got really excited because I — I was like, Katie you’re this fastest last 50 out of anybody. Wow, that was really cool. Oh yeah, it was really me, yeah. And I think in some ways, I don’t wanna say it if she’d been in the final. I think in the final, making top six, anything could have happened, but in some ways again, it was we have to move on.

Well — alright, well that just means that you get more rest for the 800 and then we just went in the 800 mode and she did a great job there. She got ready to go and obviously she had a good prelim swimming. She cranks the field at night with 8:19. I thought she could break 8:20, the plan was to break and 8:20 and she went 8:19 and it just — and again, that was — it was her super special feeling so we go to — we go home for a couple of days and that some of the Olympic coaches mentioned that they thought that was really good and it was. I thought going home for three to four days was a great way for us to get centered and it was a great way for her to sleep in her own bed and get ready for that next step. She went to the Olympic training camp and I can’t thank the staff there enough and you will see swimming enough. They just did — did such a great job with the athletes and for someone who had never been exposed to that process before, I was really impressed and the great thing about it was that she had the chance to work with John, and I told...
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The Training of Katie Ledecky (Continued)

her, I said during this whole process, the only thing I am jealous about is the fact that you get to work with John. I said, that’s the only thing I’m jealous about and I thought he was a great fit for her and John couldn’t have been more accommodating.

Asking me, well okay, what are you going to do? And I’m thinking, you just shot our bench and I was like, what do you mean John? What am I going to do? What are you going to do men? Like you tell me, I’m not going to tell you what to do, but John insisted upon it and I’m so glad he did and so what I did was every day or about – I take it by week and I would email him and I’d say, here is the yardage for the day and here is the main set that what I thought the energy system and I said, I gave yardage for the day, main set, keep her in the short course pool every once in a while and make sure she swims IM every other day, and John was incredibly accommodating. He did a great job with her and she started emailing me sets that she was doing and I was just thinking her numbers are really great. I think John can attest that she just was swimming really, really well to the point where I’ve been told that Connor and Andrew were getting annoyed with her because she was starting to keep up with them and I think that they were probably thinking, gosh, why is this 15-year-old girl nipping at my heels and so as soon as they started doing the short course where she was really close to the pool and so as soon as she touched, I was like, gosh, I wanna get down there, I wanna take a picture of her in the medal stand and so I go running down there to try and get really close and there’s – I was trying to get down to this one section and there are these two huge guards there and I’m like, okay, I got to get in here dude, I just – my athlete just won the gold medal, I wanna take some photos. And they literally got right to my face that in no uncertain terms would I ever go through those doors. I just walked away and I found out that it was the British Secret Service because Kate and William were in that section, so I’m thinking, gosh, here’s this guy with tears in his eyes and a backpack running down the hallway – I’m surprised I wasn’t like taken out, right. So I just go back up and I was just a fan for the rest of the session.

Well, like I said, I wanna talk a little bit just to give you guys some background about Katie and hopefully give you all some things that I think helped her achieve what she did and I’m using a little bit of a different presentation. It’s a little swoopy, hopefully no one will get sick. Just really good pictures, it’s a heavy medal, its really neat and I think that says it all, right.

Okay, so who is Katie Ledecky? Well, she’s been a part of our program since she was 6 years old. She started swimming because her older brother was swimming like many other kids and she wanted to join our Summer Swim Team. From day one, she’s been 100% committed. She never misses practice unless she’s incredibly sick. I’ve worked with her for about five years now, I think she’s missed three or four practices in five years. She’s very self driven and very goal oriented. She writes down her times and goals every five years. She’s very humble and she hates to lose. I think Katie is a very unassuming person. It’s really easy to cheer for her because she’s very humble and she hates to lose. I think there’s a difference between that. We always hear about the difference between liking to win and hating to lose, I think Katie is the spectrum of someone that really hates to lose. I just think the idea of someone getting the better of her just doesn’t sit well with her and she’s a great teammate. She’s incredibly supportive.

One of her questions after she won her gold medal to me was, how did the guys do back at senior champs? Those guys can wait, don’t worry about it. But that’s just her and she’s always thinking about the group and she was really excited to get back and start...
training with us, to get back into the program and I think there are four traits that you want to look for and I think that goes back to a little bit of talent identification and I don’t think that’s something that we talk enough about in our sport. Over the past five years, I’ve coached everybody in my program. I’ve coached my 9, 10s, my 11, 12s, my 13, 14s, you know everybody and it definitely makes for some long days and some nights, but one of the first things I realized when I got to my position, I had to kind of revitalize the site and it was that — you can be the most talented senior coach in the world, but if you don’t have a strong age-group program underneath you, then it doesn’t really mean anything and I wasn’t really happy with what I was seeing so I just said, okay, fine, I’m just going to coach all these kids. And I have and it worked and I really enjoyed it. it allows me to keep in touch with the 12s and it allows them to know who I am and it allows me to have my thumb print. I can’t do it for the rest of my career, but I’ve done it for a while now. But I think there are four traits that you want to look for.

Those of you who are senior coaches, if you’re coming up and you gotta keep your eye on this age-group program, one is obviously work ethic or how hard are they working? What kind of effort are they putting forth everyday? The other is natural talent. We see that you know, body type, feel for the water, race ability. You have a kid in your program that you know that last 25 that they just go into some kind of crazy mode, that’s a special kid and pull them out. And then family support. Katie’s family is incredibly supportive, they’re very bright, very smart, very involved people, but they’ve always let her and me kind of find our way and they’ve always let Katie lead the direction. So she’s always had a great family support and if you have an athlete like that, make them swim distance. Right? At least teach them how to. Teach them how to swim a really good 500 or really great 1000 or a good 400 IM or a good 1650. The 100s, the 50s, I think 50s are in the 11-year-old level are good. When they turn 12, those are going away in a year so let’s learn how to swim and get a good 100 and a good 200, but if you have a kid that likes to work, has a little bit of talent, and you notice that in practice, you give him a set of ten 100s or 20 100s, or 10-2s and if they can hold a steady pace, put them in the distance race and she what they do. That’s what happened with Katie. She was a really good 100 free styler, 100 butterflyer, good IMer, but we just noticed in practice that she has this ability to just hold. She could just compete these paces. She paces. I said, well geez, we better put her in something. In her first 500, she just swim lights out and then from there, we never really looked back.

Just a little bit of training, I’m a work-based program. I fall more on the traditional side. I believe in Rubik-free and an IM based program. I work the energy systems and we also focus on race pace. Its not just yards, I do believe in race pace. In my mind, I typically start short. We have about three 14 to 18 week cycles throughout the competitive year and those obviously changed. It’s a little bit shorter and beginning a little bit longer in the middle, little bit, kind of medium at the end, and I just think of it as September until December, January to April, April to August, and in think a lot of people talk about their year plan and four-year plan and I just, I can’t. I’m not smart enough to plan that far out. I have to kind of you know, if you were to hold a gun to my head, I could probably come up with a four-year plan, but things change. You never know what’s going to happen so, I try and go year by year and I section it up and that’s really worked for me. I use these terms, these are terms in my head. I think everyone has a different term. These work for me. We usually train about five to six weeks of endurance base training, five to six weeks of threshold training, and then about two to three weeks of what I call power and pace, and then depending on where we are in the cycle, we go 10 to 14 of rest. I will see in December, that’s usually more about five, in March it’s a little bit more like 10, and then by the end of the summer, that’s more 14, and I just kind of section that out. Obviously, as we go through those three cycles throughout the year, the endurance phase might be seven weeks, then it might be five, then it might be four, and it changes as we go throughout the year, I just – it helps me keep things in my mind straight.

Kicking in tempo training is consistent throughout. I’ve- I think like all of us consider kicking to be really important. It’s one thing that I think Katie has really improved on the past couple of years. It’s not easy, you have to stand on your kids but because there are benefits to it and the fastest swimmers in the world, I tell my kids all the time, “if you ever want to see who is winning a close race, look whose kicking the hardest at the end of the swim.”

I think her average weekly total this year was around 65, 60, 70k. I think we touched 80, I think once during the holiday training, but – and I don’t really feel the need to go much more than that. I think about how it breaks down per work a week, you know, on the upper end, we’ll go maybe 8000 yards of work out, 8000 meters, every once in a while we might go a little bit longer, but anything longer than that and I just – I started getting a little bit bored and I think the kids do too. And progression is key. I can’t stress that enough.

I think that one of the things that really worked over the past couple of years with Katie is that each year, we’ve been able...
to bump things up and added things. You know, at 13, 14 years old, she was swimming really well. Gosh, okay why don’t we just add another work out, and I was like, well, if you’re training eight times a week when you’re 12 or 13, what are you going to be doing when you’re 21 or 20s? Swim 14 times a week? You know, it’s like getting a personal trainer, should be lifting well and its like, okay, if she’s doing all these exercises and she’s 15 years old, what she going to be doing when she’s 20? And I think that’s one thing I’ve always tried to keep in the back of my mind in working with Katie and coming up with a plan for and all my kids really is, “okay, its great that you’re fast when you’re 14 or 15 years old, but I want you to be fast when you’re 20. I want you to be fast when you’re 21. And like Dave Ferris was saying the other day, “hopefully, you’ll still be in the sport longer than that.” So I consider that to be really important.

I would say about 75% of our focus this year was just preparing for the 800. I knew that was her best shot at making the team, that’s what we worked on and I felt like, if I took care of that, we don’t have to worry about the 1500. I think that’s a totally different animal so it was just the 800 and then from then, I felt she could swim a really good 400 and a really good 200. And I heard a really good saying recently and I think it was Jack Roach who was saying this and it kind of applies I think to the age group program. Its “train to train, train to compete and train to win” and I think that the feat is really – its really kind of fitting the way Katie has progressed. She is training to train. She’s training to compete, and now we’re trying to teach her how to train to win.

The endurance phase is just an example of work we want to do. I know people wanted to see some sets. You know, we do a lot of descend stuff early on. We do a lot of negative splitting, a lot of even splitting, so we might go a set of eleven 400s strap in 5 seconds each repeat and negative splitting those and descending. And you might think, okay, that’s not the X + Y + Z that I saw the other day. Gosh, you know, its pretty boring stuff. I feel like that’s only boring if I make it boring, but if I’m engaged with the athlete, if I’m given them their splits, if I’m motivating them, if I’m cracking jokes, it doesn’t have to be boring. You know, 407, 405, yeah that’s boring, but don’t make it boring. I don’t think distance training or whatever training needs to be boring. “Gosh, well okay, that was pretty good, I wonder what Adlington’s going to do on this last one.” Well your last 50 was 29.6, let’s see if you can come home in 29.4. We do stuff like a thousand 900, 800, 700 and we’ll just be taking the splits as we go along trying to get faster. One set I got from Jeff Cooper at Oakland Livewires was a 1, 2, 4, and 8, just holding phase throughout. I think Katie has done a set like that and the last round should be like 58, 157, 356, and then go like 750 or 751.

One of the more impressive long courses, I thought she did in the spring: She went three 800’s long course. We did like four 50’s of set up, three 100s at pace, and then an 800, we did that three times, and our last one was 8:44 and I thought that was really good. Famous Janet Evans said, we’ve done that before. The iron free combo work was crucial. Her best 2000, I think that’s the most impressive swim she’s ever done and we did that from a dive. She went a 4:49, her second 500 was a 4:55, her third 500 was a 4:53, and her last 500 was a 4:50. That was – she’s out 9:44 back in 9:43 and that was pretty good. And I always try and finish endurance work outs with techniques or tempo work. I think that’s really the key and sometimes I’ll even put fins on. I was talking, the 1.4 tempo is what Katie and I thought that that’s what gives her the best chance. That’s the most rhythmical that she swims with, so we’ll do stuff at the end of practice when she was getting some rest and she was going 108s and 109s holding with 13 strokes and that was really good.

We do a lot of broken swims. One of the best that she did, she did thousand of a time with 951 and then she went two 500s with 10 seconds in between and she went 945, and then she did four 250s with 5 seconds in between and she went 942 and I thought that was really good.

Then the power and pace phase, we just continued with 125s. I think that’s really important. We do a lot of broken swims, 200s and 400s and 50 is leading to 100s. When you start getting into pace and I borrowed this idea from a couple of coaches, but it’s one thing to go 100s in to 50s, but if you start doing it for rounds, so you go four rounds of four 50s at pace and then three 100s, I think that’s very valuable because when you start getting into that third and fourth 50, let’s say you’re going 29s, 30, 29, 28, 27, well on those three 100s that are following up the 50s, I wanna see 27s because I think we all know that when you’re doing pace with your athlete, especially in distance races, okay, you’re going at 103s on those 100’s long course but you’re going out in 30 and coming back in a 33. You’re not going to be going 103s in your race, you’re probably going to be going 106s. So we always stress the second 50 of any repeat. We always stress the second 50 of pace and I think that’s really important. Here is a simple set – It’s just three rounds of four 100s, descend 1 to 4 at a thousand pace and then right in to a 200 all out and then a 200 cruise and I do that about four, five times throughout the season and keep track of how that goes and call it our power set because she’s going into a descend and then right into a great 200 and I think that – and she likes that and it’s giving us good feedback and
it gives me a good feedback as a coach as to where she is.

The OT 12 – I call this the OT 12 800, that’s what I was calling it to Katie and the challenge of getting ready for Trials was the idea that we had two 800s to get – well, hopefully. That was the hope, right? You’re going to swim two 800s two days in a row. So, you’ve never done that before so what do we need to do to get ready for that? I wanna prepare her for that and I think I saw that Peter Banks was doing this with Brooke Bennett about 10 years ago, but its just two 8s, two 4s, two 2s, and I’ll make her do it on a Friday night and then I’ll make her do it on a Saturday night. I make her do it back to back days. Two days right in a row. And she always has to be better on the second day and that’s the goal, right. You have one swim, you wanna be better on the second swim and then we just do over the first repeat. You got 10 seconds rest and then you have to push the second repeat and that’s gotta be faster. The biggest things that we worked on this year was second half speed, second half swimming. How are you going to come home. In an 800 free, when you get to that 400 meter mark, all bets are off. What’s going to happen? And so, I think we did that three times this year, the very first time she did it, she was not fast and the second time, she had a little bit of trouble with it. The second time, she knew what was coming, she knew how to handle her energy. The third time, I thought she did really well. On the last one, she went 7:56 and then she pushed to 7:51. Then a 3:50, 3:51 on the 400’s, and 1:56 and 1:51 on the two hundreds. I thought that was really good with only 10 seconds rest.

And I think that physically important – at what, 16, it’s almost 2800 yards. She only has to swim an 800. It’s physically that important. I don’t really know, but I think that was mentally really important and I think that was something that I was able to go to Katie when we were talking about getting ready for Trials and say, “gosh, you’ve done something like this.” Two 800s in a row? I mean, you did two of those and then two 4s and two 2s. No problem. You could totally do this. So it was just – it was getting her ready. It was planning. It was coming up with a plan to get ready for that race scenario and if she would have had to do a semi-finals something like that, I probably would have had her do more. Maybe I should have done that more with 200, but a morning swim, an evening swim, and then another evening swim. Same set, do it three times in a row.

And then just finally talking about some stroke technique work, you know, people ask me about her gallop stroke. It’s a gallop stroke and yeah, it’s a little bit of a gallop, she’s kind of got a hitch, but I think it works what’s best for her. About a year and a half ago, she was swimming like most classic female distance swimmers. It was two big kicks and bilateral breathing, but she was always bouncing up and down and really bouncy in the water and I just – I think you can swim better than that. So the one that really inspired me was, I remember watching Michael swim the 200 free in world champs in 2007 in Melbourne and if you know anything about that race, he broke Ian Thorpe’s 200 free world record, and man, I just remember thinking, well, that’s the way free style should be swim. You know, he had an unbelievable kick behind the knee entire way. He was kicking off his walls and it was just an incredible race and so, we just watched that stroke a whole lot and I think one thing about Katie that she can do to get better is just improve her kick. She kind of goes back and forth doing a 4 beat and a 6 beat kick. I think she can hold 6 beat kick and that’s one thing that we’re going to work on as we move forward.

Front catch is key. She’s so clean up front. She does a great job getting into her catch. I think that’s her biggest strength and that’s one of the reasons why I kinda wonder who could swim that way.

Breathing pattern issues. We’ve played around, she breathes primarily to her right side and I think that’s what allows her to really torque her body and get into that great rotation. She really generates a lot of power from her hips, but I do like to have her breathe to the left side because I think it balances out her stroke. When she only gets to breathe to her right side, she tends to drift on her – her left hand comes near her body, crosses over at midline and I don’t really like that, but at the same time, when she breathes to her left side, her feet stop and she’s got a pause there. So that’s another area that I think that as she grows and matures, she’ll try and be – and maybe we just have her breathe only to the right side. Maybe.

We use cords, tubing and parachutes. I like using all those at the end of work out. I put her up on a tube and I make her have a pull buoy and a snorkel and she just goes out and swims. We’re working on catch, we’re working on feel. We do parachutes as well. The way I use – I don’t really use parachutes a lot for power or for swimming. I think I will as my population of swimmers gets older, but the way I’ve always thought is that with a parachute is that if you have a kid that has body line issues or is always wiggling, I kind of think of the parachute is – it’s like a – your swimmer is a little bit of a string, you grab that end of the string, and you pull it to straighten it out, and I think the parachute provides that and you can do some really good things with chutes. Get them kicking a whole lot, get them just working on their pull, just keeping that body line. For freestylers especially, when they drive into that breath, keeping that head really low, it’s another thing I think with Katie that we worked on, was keeping your head lower, hiding your breath, that’s one thing that Dave talked with Nathan about the other day. It was hiding your breath. Driving down really keeping that head nice and low.

In female distance swimming, I think that – I think we have to, we gotta force our girls to kick more when they’re racing distance. I think that’s the next big thing. Well not really the next big thing, but I think that’s the way girls can swim faster. I mean, you watch the best guy distance swimmer that swim with the 6 beat kick, I think girls do it okay in competition. I think they have to do it. I think we can expect that of them. I think that’s what’s going to allow a couple of girls break 8:30 at Jr. Pan Packs, it was really exciting to watch them, we got a lot of great young distance swimmer, female and male, but I think that’s one of the biggest things for any female distance swimmers – I know it’s something I’m going to be working on with Katie. Can you hold a 6 beat kick for the entire 800? And I think the 800, I think it’s kind of a long sprint. I don’t think the 800 is a distance race. I think the 1500 is a little bit more distance for sure. That’s definitely a different energy system but I don’t really consider, I think the 800 is still kind of a middle distance race.

Just some thoughts on competition with Katie, I always felt like short course was fun, but long course was key. How good is she going to be long course? Okay, she’s ranked number 1 in short course in the season, that’s good, but she better be ranked long course. Long course was key for us and she got really excited about that. Always one swim at a time, one race at a time. Best time, great. Let’s move on. Bad swim, move on. And I think, starting that at an early age allowed her, when we got to our situation at Trials, I’d like to think it helped her and me to get past the disappointment of getting 9th in the 200.
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The Training of Katie Ledecky  

(Continued)

I want the swimmers to be really self-sufficient at meets. I think it’s really important that they know what they need to do to get their bodies ready. I was very fortunate to spend a week with a great coaching staff in Hawaii last week and the Jr. Pan Pac team. They were great and if you had an athlete there, you should be really proud, but working with those kids just really underscored to me how important it is that they know what they need to do. Maybe not so much at a younger age but as they get older, they should know what they need to warm up. A lot of those kids, I’d say 95% of those kids knew what they needed to do and we were just there to help them, give them some time, but they were incredibly self-sufficient and I was really impressed by that and they swam really fast.

Have goals but stress the process and I think that’s really key. Katie has always had really great goals which she has always understood at a young age what it took to get there. Okay, okay, great. You wanna make Junior Nationals, that’s great, but here is what you have to do to get there and I think the other thing is don’t skip steps especially along the competitive ladder. I think there’s something, if you have a young athlete that’s really fast and really talented, it’s okay to go to zones, it’s okay to sectionals if they’re young. Last summer, I made the decision to take Katie to Junior Nationals instead of Nationals. She wasn’t able to be on the National Junior Team as a result of that. You have to swim at Nationals to be eligible for the National Junior Team, but I wanted her to put her in a position where she could win and stand on that podium and get used to doing that. I think learning to win is important. I think you have to practice just like you practice pace, you practice training, you have practice how – learning how to win and if you have an athlete that you feel like who’s going to be a player, teach – it goes for everyone but man, teach them how to – give them that ability especially at a young age, to win and stand up on that podium and get that medal. I thought that was really key and again, she didn’t get the chance to be on National Junior Team, but she had a great time. We both had a great time. Your deck demeanor influences performance.

When I was a young coach, I’m not that old, but when I was younger, I’d be so excited on the pool deck, I’d be pacing back and forth, oh my gosh, the kids taking care of themselves and just to think as I’ve watched some of the older coaches and as I got more comfortable with myself and been more confident, I think the way that we act on the pool deck has such a big impact on our kids. It’s being calm, it’s being confident, it’s being strong for them. I remember with Katie, at Trials it was just, we didn’t talk at all before the 400 and I looked back and my gosh, we were both so nervous, but before the 800, she had a big smile on her face, she was making fun of my middle name, we were hanging out just relaxed and I thought that was key.

And everyone asks me, what is her meet warm up? What does she do? It’s real simple, she just does an 800 swim, I tell her to mix up her strokes. She goes a 600 pull, she usually breaks that up into four 150s or three 200s, kick a 400, four 100s kick, descend 1 to 4, then a 200 drill just whatever drill she wants to work on. If there’s a small pool, we usually use that and get some tempo work just to get her up and get her moving. Going to the wall as well. Getting to 1.4 that I talked about and then just going in to some race pace. And I don’t do a lot of 100’s with the 800. I might do one. We might do one, just negative split and we go 50’s after that. I’m not someone that feels the need to cram 100s down her throat right before she swims. I think, I just don’t think she needs that, maybe early in the season but certainly as we go along and we get ready for the bigger meets, I just don’t think she needs to swim a bunch of 100’s.

And I touched on a lot of this in the opening; just 2000 probably what worked and what didn’t. Obviously, like I talked about our fall conversation, I thought that just really laid the ground work. There was really great communication between her family and the school. She missed a good amount of school this year, really good about making sure that the school knew where she was, balancing her academics and keeping that really important. I thought they did a great job with that. Again, October, she had a National Training Camp experience that was great. The NCSA meet was really a team warming to be fun. I thought the Missouri and Charlotte Grand Prix first big stage, you belong here. That’s always been my message to Katie and I think we see that sometimes in our young athletes. They get to these meets and they’re just thinking, oh my gosh, what’s going on. The person over there is doing that or – and as coaches, we think that too, oh man, that guy did 450 only to two. No, you belong here. That was always my message to Katie.

Gosh you know, it doesn’t matter, okay, those people might be doing yoga over there, they might be doing Pilates, they might be going to a 1500 for time. Do your warm up, let’s just focus on what works for us and you belong here, and at every level of the way, that’s the biggest thing I try to stress to her and I think it helped. Because I looked back in my own personal experience and I think about myself as a swimmer when I’m thinking about what I need to do for my athletes and I wish I would have believed that more when I was coming up and being a swimmer. You belong here. There’s a reason why you’re on this pool deck. It’s not by accident. Again, Olympic Trials, that was all about just managing her emotion, managing my emotion, training camp was really fun. I think Katie – that was just fun time for her because all she had to do was eat, sleep, train, and hang out with such great people and again, I just – I though Teri McKeever did a great job with the Women’s Team and she and Gregg working together. I took a lot away from Teri and the team building they did; I think they did a lot of things behind the scenes, everyone talks about that Call Me Maybe video and the chemistry. Well, a lot of work went into that and I know that they would have meetings and they would talk about it, and they would have to share and that was really important to team building. And that was another thing I took away from my experience last week in Hawaii with the Jr. Pan Pac team was, spending a lot of time working on building relationships and I think as coaches, I know when I get to a big meet, it’s all about, we have to be here and we have to do this, and why are they not warming down. Take time to hang out with the kids. Take time to talk to them. I think we all know, based on our own experiences, that sometimes we don’t always remember what time we went in a certain race, but we remember a pretty funny story. So take time when you go to meets like that. Just building relationships and again, the Games were magic, had a great time there, and fortunately that worked out really well.

And this is the last point, just training for the 800, that worked this year. That was the focus. We talked about it. We wanted to train for that 800 and the other thing was study the competition. Last summer, she went 8:36 in the 800, but she went 4:14 to 4:22 and there’s an 8 second gap between her 400’s and I mean it was good swim, it was great swim, she won, it was cool, but I said, “okay kid, it was a really good swim, not a good time, but not a bad swim.”
What I did last, I remember in the fall, I made a sheet and I showed okay, “here were Adlington’s splits from last summer, she was the world champion” and then underneath her, I put Katie Ziegler’s splits and she was the highest American at World Champs and then underneath her, I put Gillian Ryan because she was the US National Champion last summer, and then underneath her, Katie. I said, “okay, here is you” and she was the only one that had more than a 4 or 5 second jump in her 400s and I just said, “you know if you want to get to this level, this is where you need to be” and we would pull up when Janet Evans went 816 with her 200s and I’ll write that down, I’ll give it to her. That was one thing and when I made her keep that journal and when I would give her a page back, I would write down, “Great job this week, keep it up, 203, 204, 205, 204, 203, whatever Janet came home in and it was just subtle reminders to say ‘work towards this’ and she really fed off that and that really worked.”

The path to success, and this is just a little philosophy, a little bit of a broader point. Got a great quote from the legendary Australian coach Forbes Carville and he says, “our aim is not to produce champions but to create an environment where champions are inevitable.” I’ve always felt like for me, my biggest goal as a coach has always been to create an environment where my kids can succeed. I’ve never worried about how fast they were or if I was going to get fast kids this year, or who was going to be the next so and so, I was always worried about creating that environment because I was confident that if I can do that, then someone was going to show up, someone was going to develop. I think if you sit around waiting for the next Michael to walk to your door, the next Katie – you’re probably going to be really disappointed because those athletes don’t come along very often; but if you’re able to create an environment where someone like that is going to want to be a part of it or they’re going to want to come through that, then they’re going to be great. It kind of annoys me when I hear people say, “oh well, you know, anyone could have coached Michael to be fast,” no way, no way. He came up in an environment of excellence that allowed him to be that swimmer that he was and I think – I like to think that Katie came up in an environment that allowed her to be an Olympian this year.

Club coaches – we can do this, really important. I got off, I was at sectionals – you just have to be in the Olympics. I flew – Katie won, I didn’t go to bed that night. I flew to New Jersey the next day to try and get to Buffalo to go to sectionals. I had to get a bunch of kids there. I’m sitting at the Newark Airport and this is the day after Katie had just won, the night before and my flight was delayed like four, five hours and everyone around me was getting fired up and they’re yelling and it was just kind of funny because I was just sitting there with this goofy grin on my face like man, Katie just won a gold medal last night, but I get on the pool deck and Dave Ferris comes up to me from Long Island, he gets right in my face and he goes, “you better tell Frank now that us Club Coaches and age group swimming, we’re the backbone and we put four Olympians out there,” and I was like, yeah. We can do this. Don’t think that because you’re not part of a college or a center of excellence that you can’t have a great athlete and I thought, Bob said it perfectly last night. I was sitting here four years ago and thinking of ways, what can I do to get to that point? What can I do to help my athletes get to that point? And we can build that environment, set that as a goal. Our expectations as coaches are everything.

If you expect your kids to only make it to sectionals, they’re probably going to make it to sectionals. But if you expect them to be helped out our United States Swimming Team, they’re going to be able to do that as well. And I think that its just the idea that I’ll never forget a couple of years ago as well and I’ve been coming to ASCA Clinics for a couple of years and thank you so very much for everyone that’s ever come up here and spoken because it’s really helped me out a lot and if there’s something up here that you’re thinking to yourself, man, I’ve said that, thanks because I borrowed it and I’ve been using it, but I’ll never forget Schubert was – I think it was the keynote address Mark Schubert gave a couple of years ago and I’ll never forget, he was up there, he was talking about developing Bryan Goodell, he was giving the speech in his kind of gruff voice, I think it’s time people are really disgruntled over this whole center of excellence thing or where’s our money going towards any – he gets there and he goes, “You know now, I did this and you better man up,” I went whoa! I remember I went home and I was like, I better man up! I gotta do something now.

Seek knowledge, download talks, that’s been a common theme through all the talks this week, it just expands your toolbox, read, ask questions, shadow someone. Everyone says, well, you have to go shadow a master coach. I’m not one that just pick’s up all my things and sleeps on the couch so what I did, you know I just, I read a lot and I downloaded some ASCA talks. You know ASCA has always talks available and I downloaded them and I put them on the middle of the day, I’m kind of a swim dock and one day, I downloaded a talk by Gregg Troy and it was about pushing your athletes in IM am training and I got real fired up and I wrote this set and I went to practice that night and I gave the kids the set and they’re all like whoa, I’ll never forget one of the boys came up to me afterwards and he was like, “where did that come from?,” and I was like, “you know, I was listening to this talk today by Gregg Troy, he’s going to be our head Olympic coach, we have to do work,” and he kind of thought about it for a little bit and he was like, “man, I don’t who this Troy character is, but I like him very much.” I’ve never told Gregg that story, but I think it’s a good story.

Have a plan. I think if Bob and Michael have taught us anything, it’s to have a plan and believe in your plan. Institute it, believe in it. No bad days. No bad days. Try to not have any bad days, I know this for me, there’s nothing worse than walking away from the pool deck knowing that I could have done a better job, that was a crappy work out, I did not have energy today. Usually for me, I don’t know what it is, but Monday mornings I have a hard time finding, putting my thinking cap on, but no bad days and expect that on the athletes as well and I’ll never forget borrowing this from Tom and I think Tom, I got the chance to train with him leading up to 2000 and I remember him, his phrase was kind of something special and it was the idea of doing something special everyday whether it was a huge set or great kick outs, or one fast repeat, but I try and tell my kids, “Don’t leave the pool deck without doing something special that day,” and I think that goes for me. I try and make sure that I’m giving them as much energy as I can so that I don’t walk away, like I said, I hate that feeling of walking away and knowing that “Gosh, I could’ve done a better job.”

Focus on what you have instead of what you don’t and man, that’s a big point for me. I struggle with this a lot. I’m a renter, I think we trained at about seven different pools.
this past year. I was tempted to take a photo of the back seat of my car because my pool won’t let me store any of my equipment there so, in the back of my 2007 Honda Accord, I’ve probably got 12 medicine balls, a big bucket of cords, a big bucket of parachutes, and man it is a pain in the ass hauling that back and forth everyday, but it’s what I have to do and its just what I have to do and I dropped it off just about every other day and I have to pick it up and hopefully, I can get some storage spaces here, but it’s what we have. So, you do the best out of what you have. I focus on what I have instead of worrying about what I don’t.

And finally, I think this is one thing that I have always really thought of – what does your program say about you as a coach? And it’s just a little self reflection. What do your athletes say about you? Are they well behaved, are they wild, are they great racers, are they great technicians, are they good people, are they always getting in trouble on trips. What does your program say about you? I remember my early – you know when I was a little bit younger, I’d go to meets and I’d be like, “man, if I – I always felt like, gosh, if my kids don’t swim well, let’s leave the area.” I kind of still feel that way a little bit. I saw a great quote the other night and it was “Never think you’re great, but think you can be great,” and I don’t think I’m a great coach, I think I work hard and I’d like to believe that I can be great and that’s what I work towards.

And then finally, I just want to share two photos. I talked about that image of seeing Katie after the 400, when she got third, man, that will stay with me for a long time, and then also this – the pride I had and I’m a crier and I was kind of crying after her win and in this, I just lost it. When she started getting up on the medal stand and it just, I’ll never forget that and I’m so thankful that I had the opportunity to help her get to a point where she could represent our country and help her swimming and win a gold medal, and that just means so much to me, I know it means a lot to her, but – and as important as this photo is and as important as that race I showed earlier, I think that for me, this photo is even more important and I took this one morning and it was she and I and the lifeguard and it was Wednesday morning, it was before the NCSA Junior National Meet, I was having her do more work and I was just sitting there and I was like, wow it’s a really cool photo, let me take a photo. And it just epitomizes I think to me what she has been able to do these past five years when she’s just put the work, there’s no secret and Dave said this the other night, “success is not random, its planned,” and I think for me, I will always take so much pride and enjoy that moment when she got to stand up on that podium and listen to the National Anthem, but I think for me, just as important are those moments when it’s just she in the pool, working hard, putting in time. There’s nothing glorious about this. There’s nothing, but it’s the most important thing and I think that for me, this means just as much to me – the idea of just being in there and putting in the work when everyone else is in as opposed to standing on that medal stand.

I just want to say thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to be here today and I just want to say, everyone that’s ever contributed to ASCA or been willing to share their ideas or put something up online, thank you so much because I’ve used it and its really helped me and benefited my career and good luck this year and thank you very much.
Coaching Philosophies & Strategies for Working with Talented Age Group & Youth Swimmers

By Coach Bill Sweenham

The successful coach (like the unsuccessful athlete) is single-minded in toward his/her goals. Along the way we develop beliefs which influence the strategies we use to achieve the desired result.

The following points (listed in no particular order) are a collection of ideas that I’ve found useful in developing talented age-group and youth swimmers. It’s also my experience that coaches who apply senior elite training strategies to their age-group (junior) programs may misdirect their efforts or fail to achieve all they could.

These points are offered as examples of my views on communication, training, competition and team building. You may want to incorporate any/all of them into your program.

GENERAL

- If it’s measurable… measure it! If it’s controllable… control it! Record everything!
- Age group swimming is a means to an end, not an end in itself.
- Most squads are made up of 10% Achievers, 25% Survivors, and 65% Decliners. Your job is to build a team of having the highest possible percentage of Achievers.
- The recovery skill of an individual is just as important as the “sprint” or “distance” capability of an individual.
- Build your training program for under 12’s around a 200 IM focus.
- Swimmers must perform the training program to your standards (objectives) and not necessarily to the standard they are willing to offer.
- Offer variety and stimulus by changing training lanes, group order, starting end, workout presentation; etc.
- Ask yourself… How can I make (encourage) swimmers to go faster this year?
- Do not use “National Qualifying Times” as a recognition of excellence (remember NQT’s are a “minimum meet entry standard.”)
- Charge double squad fees to all “casual” or “visiting” swimmers during summer school holiday periods. Devote more of your time to the dedicated/talented athletes during summer training.
- Educate your swimmers about rules (strokes, starts, turns; etc.) by having a starter and referee attend your training sessions on a regular basis.
- Do not be afraid to forward athletes on to a higher level program if your program does not cater to their needs.
- Athletes and coaches succeed on their strengths and fail due to their weaknesses. Spend time and effort on building upon strengths and eliminating weaknesses.
- Measure your coaching ability by the success of your “least talented, but most committed” athletes.
- Part-time commitments always equal part-time results.

COMMUNICATION

- Make eye contact and verbal communication with every swimmer at every training session.
- Conduct one-on-one training sessions with deserving and talented athletes.
- Talk to a different athlete for ten minutes before and after each training session.
- Never sit down while on pool deck; always stand facing your squad. If outdoors, try not to have the sun behind you. Dress and look professional while on deck. No mobile phone on deck.
- Offer constant quality feedback (both positive and negative).
- Motivation is a lifestyle… it’s not just getting excited one week prior to a competition.
- Communicate to your Team/Club/Squad by meeting monthly with parents; fortnightly with the full Team/Squad; almost daily with the Club President; and individually or with small groups of swimmers at every session.
- Never coach tired or make emotional decisions on the spot.
- Give your best coaching efforts to your most deserving and committed athletes.
- Convert negatives into positives.
- Educate both the athletes and their parents about nutrition and drugs.
- Develop a positive public relations network and sell your program and the achievements of your athletes to the largest possible audience.

TRAINING

- Train your second best stroke at an event distance above your goal swim, i.e., main stroke freestyle, second stroke backstroke – train for the 200m backstroke.
- Use stroke-count as a training tool prior to learning to use stroke-rate as a training tool.
- Teach rhythm, control, and breathing (emphasize breathing out) as well as training pace. Use controlled breathing often in training set (a guideline is one breath every 5-6 seconds).
- Learn to even-split all repeat swims of 100m or more using even stroke-counts. Female swimmers and young male swimmers should practice slight negative split strategy.
- As a guide, training consists of a minimum 70% of training volume at or below 70% of maximum oxygen consumption.
- Alactic sprints practiced at the commencement of a training session enhances speed; alactic sprints practiced at the end of a training session enhances race specific endurance. On a frequent basis combine short, intensive strength exercises in close proximity to alactic swimming sets.
- Practice alactic sprint sets as pull, kick, swim and/or drill sets (with an emphasis on distance per stroke/pull/kick at a specific
race stroke/pull/kick rate).

- Know the difference between effort and speed.
- Sustain, rather than descend, high performance endurance sets (mature breaststrokers may be the exception to this).
- Maintain consistent weekly training volume and vary the training intensity within this volume (rather than varying the volume from week to week).
- Keep one training session per week “open” to allow individual adjustments in program design from swimmer to swimmer.
- Females (and some males) perform resistance pull sets without leg flotation devices; practice race stroke-rate.
- Use an “Individual Checking Speed” (ICS) training set on Monday morning after a session off.
- Practice underwater – fast/streamlined push-offs and dolphin kicking.
- Race someone faster during each training session.
- Do some training activity (in every workout) that requires 100% effort, i.e., this may be a swim, or swimming set, or a technical aspect of swimming.
- Consider three smaller volume training sessions a day, such as during training camps and school holidays, rather than 1-2 larger volume sessions as a way to achieve your training objectives.
- Drills should be done in a progression – commencing with very basic skills and progressing to race objectives. I.E., basic skills such as body position, reducing resistance, distance per kick or arm stroke – race skills such as pace, stroke-length, and stroke-rate.
- Correct faults immediately.
- Females to use land-based training (2-3 exercises) every day prior to pool training; mature females to add three 45 minute sessions weekly.
- Develop core body strength (i.e. trunk – abdominal, hip, lower/upper back) first.

**COMPETITION**

- During maturation, hold back two events from your competitive repertoire; these may be used to kick-start continued improvement should your performances (in your main event) plateau.
- There is no such thing as “social competition.” Have a strategy for social interaction (fun away from the pool) and a strategy for competition (serious and competitive).
- Prepare to overcome the “third day let-down” at Championship Meets by participating in weekend meets and then swimming a test set (or time trial within 3% of PB) on Monday. Follow with a full training program on Monday and have another day/session rest that week (if required).
- Practice a 3-session progression containing quality swims to prepare for “heat-semi final-final” competition format.
- Swim heats using specific race strategy on the front-half and swim finals using specific race strategy on the back-half to educate young swimmers in competitive skills.
- Prepare to race fast in winter, i.e., Northern Hemisphere Summer.
- Practice relay skills with all team/squad members.
- Use a 3-2-1 ratio to construct your seasonal competition calendar, such as three competitions below one’s current ability, two competitions equal to one’s current ability, and one competition above one’s current ability.
- Encourage weekly (juniors) or fortnightly (seniors) club swims for all team members.
- Have your Club conduct their Club Championships on the same day as another (or several others) Club and compare results.
- Differentiate the training of males and females at maturation to individualize the strengths and weaknesses of each group. Schedule an additional training session per week for some groups of females.
- Maintain an uncompromising standard for each training group: attitude, attendance training commitment, competition standard, skill, and proficiency.
- Program recovery during school exam periods and adjust morning training hours during school holiday periods (if possible).
- Have all swimmers making a national qualifying time compete in an additional swim meet (not open to the other members of your team) prior to the Championships. The goal is to improve upon time or practice a Championship meet program.
- Simulate major meets (States and Nationals) in the home program, so that the step-up to the real thing is easily made.
- Learn to swim fast heats and faster finals by scheduling morning quality sessions (as well as afternoon quality sessions).
- ‘B’ finals are a second chance for swimmers not capable of making an ‘A’ final – they are not for ‘A finalists’ swimming below their capability.

**TEAM BUILDING**

- Have a social program in your Club: beach days, movie nights, bowling; etc.
- At least once a year, invite the School Principal/Teacher/Phys. Ed (from the local schools your swimmers attend) to come along to your training session, or put on a morning tea or Club competition and sell the benefits of your program.
- Offer something different, challenging, and special in your program for each age. For 12 years, weekend training camp; 13 years, one week school holiday camp; 14 years, gym training education program; 15 years, bus tour and competition; etc.
- Conduct specialized and/or additional training sessions from time-to-time… i.e. only swimmers above 800 IPS, or stroke specialists, or State Championship finalists; etc.
- Rotate the leader of each lane… i.e. last swimmer into the water is the leader, or swimmer with the lowest heart-rate leads the next repeat/set; etc.
- Have occasional workouts that equalize the talent in your squad… i.e. girl or juniors wear fins, boys or seniors do band only pull; etc.
- Recognize and applaud 100% attendance at scheduled training sessions.
- Encourage volunteer help and manage the way help is provided to achieve your objectives: use parents as record keepers, communicators, publicists, technical officials, organizers – not as coaches.
Winning Sport Swimming: VISUALIZATION DRILLS FOR SUCCESS

By BOB STEELE

This program is presented to assist coaches in developing essential components of athletics: skill, fitness, and motivation, the keys to success in sport. The coach must decide how to best help every "individual swimmer" and then encourage their development by providing impacting "tools." The coach must believe in visualization; provide a visualization assessment, and time to learn, practice, develop and use with feedback to improve those components. For help, please contact fastswimmin@gmail.com. Please read the credits at the end of the article, and be sure to make copies of the Assessment tool and Drills for each of your swimmers. Enjoy and good luck.

Yours for FAST swimmin',
Bob Steele

RELAXING ON CUE

Relaxing on cue practice enables the swimmer to relax in about five minutes, relying mainly on "centered breathing" – inhaling and exhaling fully and mentally; flow relaxation to any tension in the 'body.

1. Have the swimmers lie down with their eyes closed in a quiet place. Relax for about five minutes, but stay awake!
2. Flow relaxation through the muscle groups by mentioning them in a "program relaxation" sequence. Move from the feet to the head, mentioning muscles/groups and with 10 seconds to relax that area.
3. Do centered breathing again and visualize each muscle group "turning off" like a string of light bulbs. Now work with a triggering cue as they breathe and relax. Visualize a relaxing color (green, blue...), scene (the beach, your room, the woods...), or word (loose, calm, warm, heavy...) that helps relax.
4. Use that word along with "centered breathing" prior to visualizing.
5. Perform this technique again. Practice twice daily for about four days recording responses in a diary.
6. Do this prior to swimming practice daily, standing or sitting. A relaxed person may have a higher pain tolerance which in training and racing may be quite helpful when one needs courage and toughness!

Following a five minute relaxation drill, have the swimmers close their eyes and visualize the following with verbal guidance by the coach. It is imperative to emphasize the importance of visualizing strokes, skills, environment, and races accurately. Don’t socialize, laugh, or use incorrect swimming techniques or skills. Imitate great swimmers.

Following the Assessment, the swimmers should use their best method, OR experiment with three ways to determine which method is the most effective for them. The effectiveness of each method will vary with the individual swimmer and they may find one method is better for skills, strategy, toughness; etc.

1. Objects: See your correct strokes and feel the water as you move over the lanes, targets, lanemarker in the pool. Feel flawless strokes as you see everything around while training or racing.
2. People: See an outstanding swimmer perform. Relate the visualization to your observation of a World, Olympic, State or Conference record holder. Visualize your face on their body. Useful in developing skills.
3. Yourself: See yourself performing the skill flawlessly, as if you were looking at yourself in a mirror or monitor or TV screen, seeing a replay of a race or practice.

ESTABLISH THE ENVIRONMENT

After taking three deep centered breaths, close your eyes and visualize the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and feelings as part of all visualizations in the pool environment, when the actual race or practice did or will occur. Use words to trigger an accurate visualization. Pause following each word to permit time to visualize that word. Involve all the senses in visualizations.

1. See: The pool, balcony, water, lane lines, lane markers, teammates, family...
2. Hear: Your coaches, teammates, spectators, officials...
3. Feel: The air, water, temperature...
4. Smell: The air, chlorine, popcorn...
5. Taste: The water...

7 EXERCISES TO PRACTICE

1. LIFETIME BEST – Immediately after the last relaxation, establish the environment and go right into stepping onto the block; take your mark, beep... Now see yourself swim a lifetime best with the strokes, strategy, pace, and feelings you experienced in that race.

   Purpose: Develop skill based upon a vivid past success!

   Question: "What is the last thing you saw?" Have the swimmers tell what they saw last. Acknowledge those that saw "celebrating" because an opportunity to celebrate is a reason to come and never miss a practice, learn skills and race hard. Have the swimmers sprint in from the pennants, practice touching the target, seeing a lifetime best and celebrating. Do
5 celebrations at the end of practice.

2. FLAWLESS FIFTY – Following a one minute relaxation, see; a championship start, entry, glide, pull-out, head pop, strong kick, long powerful strokes, turning target, fast feet, bouncing off the wall, streamline glide, pull-out, head pop, strong kick, long powerful strokes, breath control, passing pennants, reach for the touchpad with fingertips, touch the pad, stand up, see a lifetime best, turn to teammates and coaches and celebrate, jumping off the bottom, arms raised in celebration.

**Purpose:** Guidance through the race with trigger words for skills to be visualized. Eliminate negative thoughts; however, David Berkoff set a World Record with 15 negative critiquing thoughts during the race. Bad thoughts don’t always give bad results.

3. BACK-UP FIFTIES – After one minute of relaxation and establishing the environment.

Perform FIVE flawless 50’s on your own. If you make a mistake in any way, see or feel something wrong, you must back up and start over again. Repeat this drill until you’ve done FIVE flawless fifties.

**Purpose:** To perfect visualization of skills or strategies and eliminate negatives.

4. GOAL TIME FIFTIES – Relax again for ONE minute. Perform a flawless 50 on PACE or on GOAL.

a. Sit with back to pace clock or second hand.
b. Start all swimmers with a “take your mark” on 58 and BEEP on 59 for start on “0.”
c. Visualize a 50 and look at the clock upon touching to see your time. Three times and they’re on pace.

**Purpose:** Reinforce a goal pace or time in mind and the exact, positive skills needed for achievement.

5. PRE-RACE VISUALIZATION –

Practice prior to time trials or hard practice swims. Eventually use at starting blocks just prior to a race. Use in lesser meets prior to big races.

a. Relax for five seconds with centered breathing.
b. Visualize the important and sometimes faulty parts of your races being done FLAWLESSLY.

Select 2 or 3 skills, such as: streamline entry, bounce of the wall on turns, head still/no breath on fingertip touch, negative/split, out faster, change from high elbow to streamline entry, bounce of the wall starting arm the last 10 meters...

c. Complete in 10 seconds. Have swimmers rehearse with one foot on blocks at start of warm-up.

**Purpose:** A quick review of proper techniques or strategy required for success.

6. PRE-RACE WITH NOISE – Since effective visualization must be done immediately prior to a race, have swimmers perform PRE-RACE VISUALIZATION (#6) with the team cheering and yelling for the motivational situation swimmers would experience at the meet. It’s fun just before a championship start at the beginning of warm-up.

a. Have eight swimmers on the blocks as they would be prior to starting. Perform #6 with noise.

**Purpose:** A “quick” review of proper techniques in a pressure situation. Things they’ve been working on with the coach in practice; skills, strategy and maybe visualizing an opponent’s face.

b. Develop a meaningful KEYWORD that cues light legs and arms, long strokes, second wind, keeping a lead and all those things that mean success.

c. This word should focus on and be equated to a “winning goal” like: All-Star, Speeder, Hero, Blaze Orange, Gold Medal, or First Place, or Time Standard. This word is only known to the swimmer. Do not share it with others. Some swimmers have a song they sing that reves them up or takes as long as their goal time. The song must finish AFTER they touch the pad.

d. Use the word daily whenever failing adaptation begins and swimmer needs to dig deep for fortitude, courage and a RACING attitude. Two testimonials are a girl who made the Olympic Team in 3 events and a man who won the 400 meter Free at USA Nationals. The felt it made a difference.

d. Use the word before a race and/or a pressure point in the race. Don’t think about the symptoms in the race; think about the keyword and make it fit your race strategy with the help of your coach.

**Purpose:** Maintain skills and race strategy under pressure.
Age Group to ELITE

By Bill Thompson

Steve Morsilli: My name is Steve Morsilli. I’m one of your ASCA Board Members and I’m here to introduce a very close friend of mine. Many years ago, when I was a young coach, I would go to clinics and listen to Bill Thompson talk because he’s much older than I am, but he’s been – he’s been coaching at a very high level for a very, very long time. I’m sure this is gonna be a great clinic for you and Bill told me to keep it brief, but I read within the – in the printout, he’s a great guy, he’s a great coach, he’s been doing it for years. It’s my pleasure to introduce my very close friend, Bill Thompson.

I need a box to stand on here. I’m really pleased to see so many of you here today. Can all of you hear me okay? And for those of you up there in the expensive seats, everybody can hear okay up there?

Bill Thompson: Good. I’m glad you’re up there because when you fall asleep, I won’t see you and I won’t feel so bad because it’s all about me, right? If you like Lewis Black the comedian, I was thinking – I noticed a room when Chris spoke yesterday, it was really crowded and I thought I’ll go a little Lewis Black and you’ll go – I’m really impressed that there are so many of you here to hear this talk and – but you brought your friends and that puts a lot of pressure on me because you probably been going around telling people “Oh, you got to hear this guy, he’s really funny” and if I burn here, well, you’re gonna be screwed because you lied to your friends. So I’ll do the best I can to keep it light, but I have to tell you I have prepared my remarks. Because of my age, I tend to ramble, so I’ve written probably two hours worth of stuff. I’ve set my alarm on my high-tech – I have a flip phone. This thing takes – this takes pictures. If I push the seven four times, I get an S when I text, but I hope the alarm works because when it goes off at 2:20, I know I only have 10 minutes left and I want to try to stay on time.

I will qualify myself by telling you this that I joined Santa Clara Swim Club in 1957 in the AAU. I swam for George Haines there for 12 years. I started coaching water polo with George Haines in 1972 and I’ve been coaching ever since. I’ll be 63 years old in December – I know, it’s hard to believe. I’ve had a lot of work done. The lipo is not working though. Yeah, I’ve tried that, I clogged up the vacuum and they sent me out. So I’ve been coaching for about 40 years and my talk today is really pretty much about how – we all get kids that are new to our training groups who are not up to the level of the better kids in our training groups or maybe they’re much younger and how do you get them up to that level in the shortest amount of time possible and that’s something when I was asked to pick a topic at something that I think probably are the things I feel best about the way I coach. I think that I’ve done that really well especially since I’ve been at DACA the last almost eight years and I also have a background as a public school teacher. I have 18 years in the retirement system and 10 years of retirement credit after the divorce, so – yes, I’m a typical swimming coach and – so anyway, I have that formal teaching preparation that has been really something that’s instrumental to me and I do speak periodically. I do community service in our area and one thing I have tried to learn through sharing in smaller groups is that I don’t for a minute wanna tell you about what you should do or what you need to do or how you should coach. I just wanna share with you what I do and I would suggest to you that you do the same things that I tell men that I worked with that are younger than me; look for the similarities, discard the differences, but if you hear something that you don’t do, if you’re a new coach, try it. If it works for you and it gets comfortable, it will help you be more effective on the deck and have more fun and if you’re an older coach with more experience, why are you in here in an age group talk, because you love swimming and you love kids and a lot of times my peers, we hear things that we did so long ago that we had forgotten that we did that and we start doing again and I see a few – there’re either bobbleheads out there or some of you are agreeing with me, so hopefully that’s true. The other thing – I’ve already gone over my introduction time, so I know I’m gonna ramble a bit, so the other thing is when I write out a talk, I never get to the conclusion, so I said today since this is probably gonna be one of my last clinic talks. I thought I would go over the conclusion at the beginning. That way for those of you that get bored in the middle that leave, you’ll know it ended.

Why do kids swim? What is it that age groupers are looking for and if we understand that, we can clarify that and this is based on research. I’m not making this up – well, not most of it. The reason kids join the team is to become part of a group and they do that to develop and demonstrate physical confidence because that pleases their parents and certainly in looking back on my own childhood, that is one of the main drivers of why I swim. The second reason is they develop skills, fitness and a better appearance. They look better when they exercise and that pleases the kid; and thirdly and something that they had no idea what’s going to happen to them when the first time they walked in your pool gate or door is that they’re going to make friends and through that they are gonna develop social acceptance and support and it’s as simple as that and it’s so surprising, isn’t it, how we can take something like getting to the other end of the pool before the other kids and have it cause us sleepless nights and irritating phone calls and upset parent conferences and we turn it into something so complex when it is really something that can be so pure. Who can get to the other end of the pool? Who can get to the wall first and if you aren’t first can you get there faster than you ever have before? And let me help you try to do that, it’s that simple, so you can leave now, but I’ve got more.
Swimming, diving and showering can cause clogged ears which may lead to a painful condition called swimmers’ ear. Auro-Dri® is a safe, fast and effective ear drying aid to relieve water-clogged ears and keep you in the water!

For more information visit auroear.com

“I was always susceptible to ear infections and Auro-Dri® let me concentrate on performing my best.”

AARON PEIRSOL, 5-Time Gold Medalist & World Record Holder

AARON PEIRSOL’S SWIMMING TIPS

1. Work with your teammates to challenge yourselves on a daily basis.
2. On freestyle: Catch water with a high elbow; keep a strong, consistent kick behind you.
3. On backstroke: Keep your head still and enter with your pinky first.
4. On breaststroke: Work to perfect the timing of your pull and kick.
5. On butterfly: Work to find a rhythm and build that into your stroke.
6. Believe in your coaches and your training regimen.
7. Fitness and nutrition are important. What you do outside of the pool counts!
8. Use starts and turns to your advantage. Think of turns as something to perfect and get ahead, not a place to rest.
9. Always have fun and enjoy the process.
10. Use Auro-Dri® Ear Drying Aid to protect your ears when you’re done swimming.
I find that by having the friendships, they learn peer approval. They get reinforcement by significant people. Their friends and their peers make them part of a group who visibly cheer and support one another and that’s not something that I teach. I don’t have the book of cheers yet, but I know I’m gonna get one if I heard Chris yesterday, but it’s something that – I don’t tell my kids to cheer for each other although sometimes I’ll say – someone swims in the water and they can really use some support, but when I see that that’s happening of their own volition, I know that I’m creating something that makes me feel good about the direction that we’re going as a team.

I find that girls are different than boys and it’s only taken me 40 years in the profession to see that out and coaching them – what motivates them is different completely from the boys. Girls are motivated by the social group more than their competitors. They are more interested in working together as a group, succeeding as a group, succeeding as friends than they are beating one another. Boys on the other hand are why they like MMA and they seek to do better than their peers, they seek to improve how they dive or dives are better. We do the same warmup everyday. They know where to warm up with the 400, that way I’m not spending a lot of time explaining if I don’t want it. I just want to get them loose, we go 400, sometimes I’ll say it’s 50 free, 25 back, 25 breast, concentrate on your back to breast turn while you’re warming up, take your mark, go.

I command their attention. I do not talk unless they are listening with their eyes. I like that phrase, I didn’t make that up, I heard it somewhere. Listen with your eyes because most times when I am coaching, I am showing them something I want, I’m showing them. I’m talking with my body and my mouth so they have a reason to look, so when they don’t look it bothers me. One thing I’ve also found in working with a lot of kids it seems like ADHD is more and more prevalent these days and I am one and I’m really easily distracted. When somebody’s talking in the lane in front of me when I’m talking, it distracts me because I wanna know what they are saying. So I’m aware of that and I just do not tolerate inattention, ever.

So discipline, I took a class quite a few years ago when I was raising my daughters. I’m a single dad. Unfortunately, I took this class too late, it was really meant for adolescent children and my daughters are both in their teens and I realized I had lost the war, but – that we could resume the battle when they hit their 20s, when they would like be somewhat malleable again and that is that my discipline is based on mutual respect and cooperation. One of the other things I’ve learned from John Leonard both privately and in lectures like this is to praise in public. Kids like praise. Kids do not like to be criticized, corrected, humiliated in front of their peers. The message I’m trying to broadcast to them is completely lost in their embarrassment. I don’t always remember that, but I have to tell you that in the course of the last 40 years when I have had a bad show of a lack of restraint of my tongue, about 90% of my woes in my life have been a result of inattention, ever.

I give my practices structure. I assign lanes almost daily. If I let them choose their own lanes, they’re gonna all be with the people they like best and it’s not gonna be as good of a practice perhaps. It’s usually – I usually regret doing that, but sometimes they need to be with their friends especially when it’s going to be really hard where they can console one another. Every single practice, every single practice, I line them up in their lanes and we start from a start. So if you’re irritated by the girl who is always the last one who put on her cap and goggles or is always primping or the boy who can’t find his stuff, the routine of them knowing that’s how we’re gonna start and we’re gonna start on time and they better be there and they better be lined up after I give them their lane assignments and then we go a start which means that I probably get in an extra 300 racing dives a year because every practice starts that way, sometimes a good start, sometimes they’re not, but every single time we start practice, they have an opportunity to improve how they dive or dives are better. We do the same warmup everyday. They know where to warm up with the 400, that way I’m not spending a lot of time explaining if I don’t want it. I just want to get them loose, we go 400, sometimes I’ll say it’s 50 free, 25 back, 25 breast, concentrate on your back to breast turn while you’re warming up, take your mark, go.

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I command their attention. I do not talk unless they are listening with their eyes. I like that phrase, I didn’t make that up, I heard it somewhere. Listen with your eyes because most times when I am coaching, I am showing them something I want, I’m showing them. I’m talking with my body and my mouth so they have a reason to look, so when they don’t look it bothers me. One thing I’ve also found in working with a lot of kids it seems like ADHD is more and more prevalent these days and I am one and I’m really easily distracted. When somebody’s talking in the lane in front of me when I’m talking, it distracts me because I wanna know what they are saying. So I’m aware of that and I just do not tolerate inattention, ever.

So discipline, I took a class quite a few years ago when I was raising my daughters. I’m a single dad. Unfortunately, I took this class too late, it was really meant for adolescent children and my daughters are both in their teens and I realized I had lost the war, but – that we could resume the battle when they hit their 20s, when they would like be somewhat malleable again and that is that my discipline is based on mutual respect and cooperation. One of the other things I’ve learned from John Leonard both privately and in lectures like this is to praise in public. Kids like praise. Kids do not like to be criticized, corrected, humiliated in front of their peers. The message I’m trying to broadcast to them is completely lost in their embarrassment. I don’t always remember that, but I have to tell you that in the course of the last 40 years when I have had a bad show of a lack of restraint of my tongue, about 90% of my woes in my life have been a result of inattention, ever.
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to do. Otherwise, when I’m not in control of myself and Ioller at somebody — I’m fine and I don’t know about you, but these kids who are the nicest kids I’ve ever worked with do not come from homes that get – where they get yelled at and I used to be a really good yeller, old yeller they called me, it’s a Disney film.

But I’m finding that that doesn’t work anymore. The discipline – Chris mentioned it yesterday in his talk, the ready position on the send-off. That ready position on the send-off, that’s the back half of the change of direction of a two-handed turn. If their hand is on the wall and their feet are up and their knees are up on the surface and their knees are bent properly and they bring the hand off the wall on the send-off behind the ear, that’s the back half of the change direction of a two-handed turn. How many send-offs that we do in a work out? At least one. So there are hundreds of opportunities to do half of a two-handed turn. So if your kids only swim in freestyle, don’t worry about it.

Each swimmer I’m expecting and commanding that they be present, I expect them to know what their time is. I expect them to know where they came up off the wall. I expect them to know what their time is. I expect them to know where they be present, I expect them to know... I wanna make sure that that next day they have a chance to do that over again and then I also tell the kids that weren’t there on Monday – at Tuesday’s practice that when they weren’t there, they missed something of value to them. By doing that, you’re teaching your swimmers, in my opinion I am teaching my swimmers anyway that there is a cost to their absence, there is a loss when they are absent.

Now, how do you make a new kid in your group that’s usually slower, who has less base feel part of the team, feel part of the group? I have to tell you that one of the things I get most excited about is not the kids that make finals at Far Westerns. I had a 12-year-old-boy this year that was 119 in April or May in a 100-meter breaststroke, he didn’t swim very well. In June, he went 121 in a 100-meter breaststroke and in July at JO’s, he went 139 100-meter breaststroke, he’s 12. That’s not the kid I’m most excited about. The one I’m most excited about is the one that I got in April and the group moved up who’s a 13-year-old eighth grade boy who’s super tall and skinny and uncoordinated. He went from 255 in the 200 breaststroke to 233 in July. That is why I coach, that is what I love to have happen. I had a swimmer that started in our group in... I’ve watched you practice and I know who you are. I recognized some talent and just so you know that same kid that when we go quality fifties kicking, dolphin kick on his back goes 27 from a push with no stroke on his back for fifty kick, so he’s gonna be swimming with Chris this fall. He’s a 14-year-old 9th grader starting this fall. That stuff gets me really excited. So how do I do that? Well, I went to practice Tuesday because I’ve been on vacation and I met two new boys that came out of another group that I already had met one of them before and I told them why I didn’t think because you get moved up last summer and so, and he was cool about it because I told him I didn’t think it was a good time, I said “But in September you’re gonna do great because I know you’re a hard worker” and so I touched bases with him again and welcomed him into the group on Monday, but there’s another boy that moved that I hadn’t met, but I knew that he came to practice everyday and I let him know that I knew that. I said, “I’ve never really known you, but I’ve watched you practice and I know who you are.” So right away, they feel special. Those kids feel special and already – I’m developing a relationship with them and then I proceeded to put him in the lane with a bunch of other boys and I said, “This is John and this is Trevor and you guys here make sure that they both know all of your names” and there were seven other guys in that lane, it was during warmup time. So you make sure that these two guys know all of your names the next time I check and so right away they are starting to pal up.

Some of the other things I do to make kids feel welcome, I’ve had some kids come into my most elite group that only had an A time or two, and basically, to keep it simple, the times I looked at are A times, JO times and Far Western times. Far Westerns is the toughest time standard to make in RLSC, it’s a really fast meet and so that’s really pretty much what I’m expecting all of our kids to make that time eventually. Not all of them do, but that’s what we’re about. And so after we go to a meet, I get all the ribbons, all the medals, all the A medals, tons of medals, glad we’re not going through the airport and I sit them down and we have a little team meeting which is no meeting at all, but I hand out – we have an award ceremony and so when kids get new A medals, everybody in the group knows he got a new A time and then I have kids stand up when I say who got their first ever Junior Olympic time and those kids stand up and we all give them a big hand. Anybody get their first Far Western time, same thing and so on. Well, I went through the meet results today and I might – I actually have a computer and a flip phone and I went through the meet results today and these people went 100% best times at the meet last week and I have them all stand up to be recognized and it’s – the kids would go 100%, all best times are usually the new ones. So right away, they’re starting to get a lot of recognition.

We do social gatherings and you probably do too, but we don’t do it very often so when we do them, I think the kids think that they’re pretty special – it’s an event they get excited about. We do have one team meeting in the fall at the start of the season in September and that team meeting is where I hand out the meet schedule, I talk about the rules, the gear they supposed to have and so on, and the parents are required to attend as guests. It is not a parent meeting, it’s a team meeting and they get to hear what the coach is telling their kids because what I’m trying to do is that this is the first time in our
Age Group to Elite (Continued)

program that kids are supposed to become the facilitator between the coach and the swimmer, not their mommy. So what I’m teaching them is that this is their sport. They need to be the person that knows what’s going on so they can tell their parents what they need. The parents are there to help them, enter on the computer their meets and I tell the kids either have your mom give me her credit card or have your mom give me her credit card number and pin number and I’ll take care of your entries and my Christmas shopping needs.

I want them to feel like they’re coming into a different culture and we really have established a culture. My group is different from all the others. Most meet their people that don’t wanna come into my group. There’s a boy that came in to my group last April and I had a chat with him before he came in to my group, he’s about 5 feet 11, mom is Taiwanese, his dad is a Caucasian about 6’ 2’. This kid is 12 years old and he’s 5’ 11”. He goes to a private school where the tuition is 33,000 dollars a year and he didn’t come to practice very often, but he showed some real talent and he had been swimming with me in an intermediate group, but last year I stopped coaching that group, so he was swimming with one of my colleagues, with Golda, and I watched him at meets and he was doing really well, but he wasn’t coming to practice and so before he came to my group, I said, “Michael, I don’t see you practice everyday, when you swim with me, you don’t come everyday, so what is your schedule like because I expect you to be here everyday” and he said, “I’m in a jazz ensemble, I play the drums on Monday after school.” “What time are you done Michael? We start at 4:30” he said, “I’m done at 5” I said, “Well then I’ll see you at 5:15.” “Oh, I can’t do that.” “I suggest you can – you can do that because an hour is better than zero and then hope you get into this group because if you come everyday it won’t be so difficult. If you don’t come everyday, you’re prolonging how difficult the adjustment is going to be to.” He started coming every day and this is a kid that only had A times and maybe one JQ cut I think, okay. He made Far Westem three months later in every event that he swam and then he went on vacation for six weeks all of June and July. So Michael’s back and we’re starting over, but he is still in the jazz ensemble, but he is on time at practice on Monday and he told me – he promised me under a threat of death that he would come everyday.

So my expectations, it’s best to tell him before they come, that they should come every day and no one does. Although the kid I told you about with the 57 backstroke who also went 104 flat this summer long course 100 back, missed three practices the whole year and she missed three practices the whole year and she totally is my most dedicated swimmer and most improved and I remember watching her the first week that she got placed in my group because I didn’t know her and I said, “What is this kid doing in my group and she was awful” and she has become a really good swimmer, 200-breaststroker that has Far Westerm in the mile. You don’t get that everyday.

I also tell them what they can expect. I tell them as a group. I tell them individually. They can expect to be challenged. Don’t you want me to challenge you? You can expect to be held accountable, to be responsible. You can expect to be respected. You can expect to be held to a higher standard than ever before. Now, the nice thing about the group that I have, I have a little kid that was so fast in our white group that he got moved in my group as a 9-year-old and the only reason it was really agreeable to me is I was also coaching his older sister at that time and he is still with me. I have this boy – he’s a 230, 200-meter butterfly. He’s 12 years old. He’s a pudgy little guy, I really like him and he plays flag football in his Catholic school and he’s on the basketball team and when he’s done with those activities, he comes to practice if he can and where was I going with that?

I was really worried about him being in the group because I know that he was scared, but the nice thing is, is I get to coach him. Oh, the train of thought that was derailed just got back on the tracks. Where I was going with that was that I get to coach him for four years, so when he’s done with me, when he moves in the 9th grade, chances are really good the he’s gonna skip our development group and be able to go right to the national group. He’s a great little athlete and he’s played lots of sports. He’s everything that Chris is looking for. They can expect to be challenged from viewing themselves differently than they ever had before because chances are good if you get kids from another team or from another lower group that their parents have been bringing them to practice to improve their skill in swimming. So they look at themselves as going to swimming and being on swim team, okay. I’m on swim team. I’m in boy scouts. I’m in soccer, but they do not look at themselves in the mirror and go, “I am an athlete and I do what athletes do. I eat right. I live right. I excel at everything I do. I excel in school. I excel in swimming. I excel in training. I excel in everything I try to do. I always try to do what I think is my best.”

So I try to change their self-image and there are some great ways to do that by doing that really allow them to go much faster like, I have a minimum performance in kicking I expect everybody to do. We go 25 kick no slower than on the 30. Now, that may sound mainstream to you, but it’s not on our team, but we don’t ever go any slower than on a 30 unless it’s something really super special. I’ve even gone to sets where we’ve gone one on the 30, one on the 25, one on the 20 and we’ll go multiple rounds because I expect the minimum standard to be under 20 seconds in any stroke. Do all of them do it? No, we all have sucky kickers on our groups that have Tea-strainers for feet, but that’s the minimum standard and that’s something for them to aspire to achieve. They know they’re getting better when they’ve never broke a 20 and now they’re breaking 20 and then they can hold under 20. They know they’re getting better. They know they’re gonna swim faster, builds great confidence. Same thing on 50s, I expect them to break 40, they don’t all do it. In hundreds – in competition, I expect them to be under a minute. They aren’t all there and when they break a minute in 100-freestyle, I tell them the next thing to do is to break a minute in a 100 fly or back, so we’re always resetting our minimum standards.

They’re required to know their best time. They’re required to know their goal time. We do goal cards. I didn’t know you did goal cards. We do goal cards and I expect them to know their time standard for the next level they’re trying to achieve and the splits that will take to do that and I help them with that. I help them with the math and then they help me learn how to use my computer and do PowerPoint. I’m a killer at arithmetic and I was talking to a kid the other day and I said to him I was coaching another group because Christian was already here and I said, “Michael, why are you late?” and he goes, “I have a calculus class over at Lindbergh High School every Monday.” I go, “Oh, I’ve heard of calculus.”

Some of the social activities that we do, we do potlucks, those are really fun. You have to be careful about nut allergies. Seriously, you really do. Usually, when I do a little flyer on that, I’ll say the boys were doing a potluck breakfast. The boys are gonna bring the meat and potatoes and eggs and the girls can bring the baked goods, the milk and the juice. Please, no products with nutmeat in them due to allergies. We go out to eat. A lot of times after Saturday practice, we go out to eat. We go out to breakfast, hometown buffet, unlimited decadence. I remember when I first came to DACA and I had this intermediate group, we had a root beer float party and I was amazed that of those 17 boys in that group, none of those 11- to 14-year-old boys had ever had a root beer float. That’s just wrong, so I have made at least that part of their world right now.

At the end of the year and we don’t do it every year, but at the end of the year if I have a super fun group and it works in my schedule, we do a pool party where they bring – I bring mats that can’t be sunk and they bring pool toys and they just play and then I barbecue for them because actually my nickname is Barbecue Billy, a legend in my own mind. One of the things I did when I was at San Jose is I organized an all-star camp because we – not all the kids can make the all-stars, so we had an all-star camp. We had T-shirts and I had my national group, my college and my elite high school swimmers do all the lecturing, all the teaching. They had to prepare talks. We did a clinic. We did a workout. We did some slideshows.
We talked about nutrition then we ate, then we trained again. It was an all-day thing. So all those things I think really do a lot to bring the team together, the group together and bonding. We do contest which – our contest really are a lot of fun and can be motivational. We do them during meets where we choose teams and score it, I know Chris does the same thing, only better and I also do individual contests and one of the reasons is to get kids to enter all the meets, all of the events that they’re allowed to enter. If they’re allowed to swim a maximum of four events, I want them in four events. And so, if they do that, they get points for that. If they go best time, they get points for that. If they don’t breathe inside the flags, they get points for that and if you reach a certain amount of points because I work out a potential of what they need to do to hit about 80% of the points possible. If they win their heat, they get points. If they win the event, they get bonus points. If they get a new Far Western cut, they get bonus points and if they do it individually, they get to skip practice and we go to get pizza, but if the group as a whole averages 80% of the points possible as a group, even if some kids are not in the meet, we all go, and surprisingly, they always win. So they feel like they’ve won and the group come together and we take a night off and we go to pizza instead, go to Jake’s, it’s awesome. Sometimes, I’ll do the same thing, but it’ll be a pig party and it’ll be totally an individual contest where I’ll get a vanilla ice cream, three different kinds of syrup and they can eat all the ice cream sundaes they want to and for extra fun, sometimes we do it before practice. I don’t feel so good.

In assigning lanes, there’s a great way to do bonding when the De Anza College group started coming over to Saratoga that will train with us on Saturday so we get all these kids knowing each other. All of Tammy’s girls would all get in their lanes and Annie’s guys would all get in their lanes and my girls and guys would all get in their lanes. So assigning lanes, you can force mixing and I do it just to keep thing mixed up. I will have them choose or if something has been working really well with getting these new kids that are older into the group that are much slower than my oldest, fastest kids, is I just assign two lanes. One lane – two lanes for the 8th graders, two lanes for the 7th graders and all of you lesser beings can get in lane 5, so the 5th and 6th graders get in lane 5. I do it by gender. Sometimes, if I’m gonna do a quality set, I got this from the great Jason Carter, I line them up and according to their best 100 freestyle time and I can either have – go lane one, two, one, two, one, two. If I want all the fast kids in the first two lanes or if I wanna go in heats with a lot of rest in between, I’ll take the first six and they’re in the first six lanes and so on and so forth.

So basically, I’m seeding workout based on the 100-freestyle time. At certain cycles, I will put kids in lanes based on their best strokes or their specialties and I was listening to Dave Morris this morning and it’s interesting that the mesocycles that he used at the elite training center is kind of similar to the way that my brain thinks as far as picturing the calendar as it relates to our peak performance meets. There are times when kids that are going to Far Westems in the breaststroke that don’t even have A time and I shouldn’t be doing general training, so there is some point in time when we have to specialize.

One of the biggest differences that I’ve seen in my coaching career, I noticed it when I was at Santa Clara back in the 70s that kids were very physical and they seemed to be fairly strong. I guess the main point is since I’ve been at DeAnza Cupertino Aquatics and back to coaching middle school-aged kids, I have never seen such physically weak children. Children are not strong. Mom would send me out and say, “Be back before the streetlights come on.” I rode my bike to school everyday or I walked. I would roller skate around the block all day long. We would go over to school and play softball or baseball all day long and kids don’t do that, they are driven everywhere. So I really had to change my approach to dryland and there is nobody that I have ever met that knows more about getting kids strong fast than that guy right there and Chris owns a cross-fit gym and he trains firemen and policemen and military and some of the state women and some amazingly fit people, and my real chore in 11- to 14-year-old swimming is getting kids to be physically fit. Dick Shoulberg is one of my heroes and his whole deal is that his goal is to develop and coach athletes not swimmers. I don’t wanna coach swim nerds, I wanna coach fit athletes who can do anything.

And so, Chris has a website and you might want to jot this down because it’s terrific when he keeps it updated, its dacanationalteam.com. I hope you don’t mind my doing that, if you do, well, I won’t snore tonight because we’re rooming together. He posts his dryland workout that is cross-fit basically and I love it, and typically in the past, I’ve done dryland until I found that they were losing interest with it which usually took about six to eight weeks and they got tired of doing push-ups and sit-ups and leg lifts and squats and squat jumps and running and it was boring because it was either on an interval or it was by sets, but it was boring and it was all demanded by me and none of it was self-motivated and it was part of practice.

So I’ve added a dryland program to my training schedule now that I don’t have a second coaching group and it’s voluntary. You don’t have to come, but on Tuesday and Thursday I’m gonna be there at 4 o’clock and we’re gonna go to 428 and we’re gonna get strong and if that’s not something that you wanna do, don’t come, but I haven’t had to send a kid out of dryland and we did dryland all year last year
and they never got tired of it because every session was different and they could compete against themselves in self-improvement. They could compete against — all the girls competed against all the girls, all the boys compete against all the boys or forming teams, small teams of three, teams of four, teams of 10 each. There’s one game that we play where each suit on a card is a different exercise. The repetitions are the number on the card. Team with the most cards at the end wins. You have to run to me in rotation to get the next card. You cannot leave until the last person has finished the exercise. It’s really intense. They’re soaking wet when they’re done and this is in the winter, not just summer and it’s not raining and they love it, so check that out. If you can look at a different approach to dryland, I’m telling you within six months, I could literally see the change in their bodies at how they become leaner and more defined and they had become much stronger and their times really were improving.

Some other things that I do that I think that are really motivational, we had a real problem with kids getting excited about being on a relay team. I know when I swim, I would’ve killed somebody to get on a relay team. My age group coach used to say, because I was built like this when I swim, Billy Thompson, you carry the weight of the team and I always wanted to be on relays. The first medal I got at Santa Clara Swim Club was an 8 and under, 100-yard freestyle relay with Dickie Perry and Stevie Stern and Jimmy Lombardi, that was in 1958, I never forgot that. It’s actually the only thing I can still remember. So we had a real problem with kids not wanting to stay for relays. It was a bother, I hate it and so we got together last year and we talked about this and what we started doing was we started taking all the events that would be a relay leg and after every meet, we had a ladder and an update. So the top 8 – because we want them to think A and B relay, so the top eight 50 freestyle times were posted and the top eight 100 freestyle times were posted in 13 – 14 age group to 200 freestyle and so on. You get the idea, but we posted it on our website and it became a badge of honor to get on the relay.

And we had kids this year; it was a completely 180-degree turnaround, wasn’t it? Where we had kids that were battling for relay spots and I had one girl that was – all of a sudden she had kids that were battling for relay spots and 180-degree turnabout, wasn’t it? Where we had kids this year; it was a completely 180-degree turnabout, wasn’t it? Where we had kids that were battling for relay spots and I had one girl that was – all of a sudden she started getting serious. My best cross-fit girl also had the worst attendance and she was missing practice and I finally said to her – I said, “You know, Eunice” – her last name is Eunice Can, but Eunice can’t. But Eunice Can I said – this was the beginning of the long course summer schedule and she missed the second morning because we go again in the afternoon I said, “If you miss one more morning, I don’t care how many people you beat and pass by, you’re not swimming on relays.” She never missed another practice. She wound up being our fastest 50 freestyler, 50 flyer, our second fastest 50 backstroker and our second fastest 50 breaststroker out of the whole age group. Motivation, threats, if nothing else works, threaten the hell out of them.

Double dips, if you have trouble getting kids excited about swimming fast in the morning than at trials and finals meet, try the world famous Jerry Double Dip Reward System. Here is how it works. If you go to JO’s or Far Westerns and you go a best time, a lifetime best time in prelims and you make finals and you go faster than that in the finals, that is a double dip. It has nothing to do with two of us coaches sitting together. We’re double dips also, but of a different kind, and if you get a double-dip certificate, when the meet is over, you cash that in on two scoops of ice cream. Now, Jerry, he would get coupons for Baskin-Robbins because he’s not cheap like I am. I buy ice cream and I scoop it up for the kids and I do little scoops so that everybody gets some ice cream to celebrate the accomplishment. I gave out a lot of double dips this summer.

Another meet, if you – I had the kids instead of me giving them coaching feedback, I had them come to me and I said, “Tell me what you did best in that swim.” So I had them feedback to
me. I didn’t breathe inside the flags, here’s a poker chip. I won my heat, oh, here’s another poker chip. I did a best time, here’s another poker chip, anything else? My turns were good, nah I don’t think so and then they put these chips in the container and if they filled it by the end of the weekend, they got Bill’s brownies. Now, these are not the same brownies when I was in college at Long Beach State. These had chocolate chips in them instead of seeds.

And then we also – I tried to not only motivate in that way, I tried to give them incentives – like if we do a quality set where we go – I did some tests to that too and I know that these are things that – and I’m gonna skip down here because my alarm went off so I’m running out of time. We do a lot of contests during practice. We do a lot of fundraising things where it’s not even related to swimming. We do a lot of contesta during practice. We do contests where if you’re the fastest person, you get a poker chip. You could do some incentive thing where if you’re the fastest person, you get a poker chip.

I try to make people feel like they’re part of the team. I try to make people feel like they’re part of the team. I try to make people feel like they’re part of the team. I try to make people feel like they’re part of the team. I try to make people feel like they’re part of the team.

So yeah, we’re doing a lot more dolphin in it and for me, the minimum is three. I know for you it’s eight and for me that’s too much, but I want them to do at least three. I have not permitted my age group freestylers to do dolphin kick and freestyle. I tell them that until you can do it in backstroke and in butterfly proficiently and do it on the third push-off at the 75 of the 100 fly, you’re not good at it yet and I also see a lot of kids, little kids doing dolphin kicks in freestyle that actually slows them down. But my group has gotten good enough now at dolphin kicking underwater and their breath control has improved where this year I’m going to begin doing that in freestyle. I have enough talented kids that I think that they can do that, but as a basic skill, I’m not a fan. I do two-handed send-offs where they hold the wall with both hands and point their legs at the other end and they have to pull in and do a ready position from the approach and we’ll do that all workout or we’ll at least do it on an entire set or two so that they are always reminded about that and thinking about that and this is something that as a goal for myself this season that’s something that I wanna do. I’ll warmup with one-handed freestyle turns like in the old days. When I was a little kid in freestyle, you had to touch the wall before you could tumble your turn and I was too fat, so I had to touch the wall and back up a little bit.

So we do Bill’s turns, we do one-handed turn freestyles, so you go in the wall and get on their side and come off the wall nice and smooth and they start feeling that. If they streamline their feet and bring their knees up towards their hand on the wall that they’re gonna get turned around with ease. So I’ll be talking later on today about coaching turns and starts and we have like two or three minutes and if there is something you would like to ask me right now over what I covered, I’d be happy to tell you right now, anybody? Yes, sir.

Test sets, 16 100s on the 1:40. That tells me that the fastest five of those is something that I would hope that they could hold on a 500 freestyle. I asked Pablo Morales one time when he was coaching with me at San Jose Aquatics, “Pablo, what’s the hardest set that you ever did?” He said, “16 50s on the minute butterfly from a dive all out.” That is a major test set. First week, a long course training, we go 16 50s on the minute freestyle and I tell them, “You should be no slower than 4 seconds over your fastest short course time and they can’t do it.” So here’s a kid that goes 37, she’d be pushing off 31-32 that’s going 36 or 37. I’m getting upset about it, but it’s to make that adjustment to long course and they know because we do that every week or two. They know that when they’re getting down there to 34 and 33 that we’re getting adjusted to long course training, they’re getting faster and then we do it stroke and it really screws them up.

I really think a broken swim is two for test sets. It is something I really enjoyed as an athlete with George and something that we do really regularly and another set that I like to do is three 550s on the 7-minute 7-30 or 8 minutes depending on the ability, so kids stop being scared of the mile. I went on Pacific swimming website today to look at our age group rankings and I had a lot more kids ranked in 200 and above than I do in the sprints, but I also have kids – it’s lonely at Far Westerns because they swim the mile during the break and it’s me and Annie and then the same coaches that we always see, the Pleasanton coaches were there and the Terrapin coaches were there and the Pacific coaches were there and Santa Clara’s got their entire staff there because our kids will swim a distance freestyle.

Anybody else who has a question?

Mike you’re the last swimmer I swatted with a kick board and that was 1979 and I don’t do that anymore. The biggest change that I’ve made in the last five years – wow, that’s a great question. I don’t know. I’ll get back to you on that one. I’m not sure there’s a lot. Every now and then I remember something I did a long time ago and I’ll infuse that, but I’m not done learning and I go to these clinics just like you and I sit there and I take notes and I jot stuff down and if you’re serious about coaching, go to the meeting after the meeting, talk to each other about what you do, what contests do you do? What games do you play? What’s your incentive program because that’s where you go back with new ideas that make you a better coach? If you’re a better coach, your kids will be better swimmers.

One thing, don’t get too excited about times up or down or rank, is there anything else because you cannot create talent. A kid has X amount of talent component. Our job is to try to bring the best out in everyone starting with me, anybody else? Keep it fun. If you’re having fun, they’re having fun. Bob Steele always said, “If it’s not fun for me to watch, it’s not fun for you to do.”

Thanks very much.
John’s Rules for Talking with Athlete’s

By John Leonard

(All rules are meant to be broken…occasionally. Rarely. This list is offered as a set of guiding principles for new coaches with my team. Hope it’s useful to others!)

1. We do not use sarcasm. Sarcasm is for your peers. (And it is stupid with anyone if you think about it long enough…fun, but stupid.) Athletes are not our peers.

2. We speak to athletes with respect. It should be “ladies and gentlemen” for everyone ages 8 and up. (“boys and girls” is just not the same.) We want them to aspire to be “LADIES AND GENTLEMEN”, so we will call them that. You become what you think about.

3. This should go without saying, but we NEVER use profanity around athletes.

4. We do not have personal (as in talking about ourselves in any depth) conversations with athletes. They do not need to know that much about you. Hobbies are fine. Your date last night is not.

5. Parents are our CLIENTS, not our social friends. (see #4 again.)

6. Instructions should be SHORT, CONCISE, PRECISE and EVOCATIVE (painting a picture.)

7. Do not REPEAT instructions. Make the assumption (and thus, force the fact…) that everyone is LISTENING. If they fail, they’ll definitely do better next time, as not knowing what is going on, is embarrassing.

8. To get attention, LOWER your voice, don’t RAISE it. Raising your voice makes everyone else raise theirs. Counter-productive.

9. Talk very little. Demonstrate with good athletes close to the target age, size, etc. TALK VERY LITTLE.

10. The first through the 5th time that an athlete makes a mistake, correct it gently. From failure #6-10, correct it FIRMLY. After ten, you can get loud, but don’t get insulting.

11. If an athlete wants to talk to you about their race and you don’t coach that athlete directly, refer them to their primary coach. IF the PC is not there, keep your remarks short, to the point and presage your comments with, “I don’t know you well, but here is what I saw…” Same preface for parents who may ask you similar questions who you don’t usually work with.


13. 13. Conversations should address the marvelousness of the HARD WORK of an athlete. Don’t praise TALENT (labeling…) Praise Hard Work.

14. 14. Conversations should point out how practice performances relate and result in meet performances…both good and bad. What you practice is what you’ll get in a meet. Be careful that you know what you are practicing.

15. 15. When asked a question about food choices, give your best answer but don’t push it. Food selection is a deeply emotional topic in most families.

16. Religion. See #15 and say even less. Nothing starts a war more than a conversation on Religion.

17. We don’t provide “artificial” praise and feedback. IF you have something honest and good to say, say it. In this program, we believe that good self-image comes from real world accomplishments, not someone saying “good job” to you all the time. Honest coaching means telling the athlete the truth. It’s INSULTING to an athlete to do anything less. Corrective Criticisms are a COMPLIMENT, because it means, “I believe you can do better.” (If I didn’t believe that, I wouldn’t bother offering corrections..) Parents need to understand this also.

18. 18. We Don’t comment on Girls Weight. We can comment on “fitness levels”.

19. Aim all conversations in the direction of what the athlete can achieve. Encouragement without placing false expectations is important. Discuss PROCESS of getting better, not just goals to reach along the way.

20. Goals are good topics of discussion, but they can become CEILINGS. Nothing wrong with aspiring to Greatness. But when a child is making four workouts a week, aspiring to make 5 makes more sense than dreaming about the Olympic Team.

21. Parental conversations…see #20. Exactly the same. Not Dreams. Not necessarily even about Goals. Lots about understanding and supporting THE PROCESS.

22. Meet Conversations…On the way to the block…younger swimmers “Here’s what I’d like to see you do here.” Older swimmers – “tell me what you’re planning to do here” (develop self-reliance, not dependent swimmers.)

23. On the way back from the Block – “tell me about your swim….what was your goal, your one rabbit to chase….did you catch it?”

24. After feedback on a swim….always “give hope” – “here is what you need to improve to do better. And here is how we’ll work on it in practice.” People live in/on HOPE.

25. Sunshine and OPTIMISM are a force multiplier. Doom and Gloom should go home and hide under the covers. You’re a professional Swimming Coach for heaven’s sake. No one cares what your “mood” is…you’re working. Get over it.

26. LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN. And then…LISTEN SOME MORE. Don’t be in a hurry to speak. Steven Covey says “seek first to understand, then to be understood.” Fabulous Coaching Advice.

There are 100 more. Start writing your own as you think of them. ■
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