



Tri Swim Coach Newsletter

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Happy New Year!

Dear Friend,



I hope the new year is going well for you so far, and the holidays didn't weigh you down too much.

It's been raining and overcast for a week straight here in typically sunny Southern California! I find it easier to swim in this weather than anything else, even though we only have outdoor pools available here. If you're going to get wet anyway, it might as well be in a pool, right?

Let's look at an article today by Active.com's Alex Kostich on the popular topic of drafting in triathlon swimming. I agree with the points in the article and hope that more people follow these guidelines!

Cheers,
Kevin

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Swim drafting: So it's legal, but is it sportsmanlike?

By Alex Kostich
Active.com
8/17/2001

Virtually every sports-advice column or article on triathlons and open-water swimming extols on the virtues of "drafting."

Also known as "dragging," drafting involves the somewhat unsportsmanlike activity of swimming closely behind someone slightly faster than you, allowing you to coast on their wake and go along for the ride.

While extremely popular and even legal in ocean swimming and the swim portion of triathlons, drafting is an offense (in amateur competition) in the cycling portion of a triathlon, punishable by disqualification. This hypocrisy is baffling, and I am going to go out on a limb here and undoubtedly ruffle a few wet feathers by lambasting the practice and hopefully shedding some light on why it may NOT be the most beneficial way for you to rely on a perceived competitive advantage.



perceived competitive advantage.

Discomfort

The biggest and most obvious reason to avoid drafting is that it's extremely unpleasant to swim behind the whitewater churned up by a lead swimmer's feet. Swallowing sea foam with each breath is not the most enjoyable (or efficient) way to race, and complicating matters further is the likelihood of a foot connecting with your face in the spastic throes of competition. One heel to the eye socket, and a goggle can dig into your eye and cause serious damage.

Stroke technique

Another disadvantage to drafting is that it directly hinders your stroke technique, and in some cases your efficiency. A swimmer's wake creates patterns and pockets in the water, and if you are coasting on that swimmer's wake, your hands are slipping through these swirling currents and pockets instead of grasping still, steady water to propel yourself forward. By slipping through this water with your arms instead of catching it and pulling through, your stroke is less efficient and your hard-earned technique falls apart, battered by the rough undertow left by the swimmer in front of you.

Visibility

Drafting also hinders your ability to "sight" during an open-water race. Every few strokes, it's necessary to look up in front of you and gauge your direction based on landmarks or guide-boats or paddlers. If you are drafting, all you can see when you sight is someone's kicking feet, and the whitewater they churn up. You should never trust the swimmer in front of you to know where he or she is going, and depending on them to sight for you is a big mistake.

False sense of speed

Drafting makes it seem easier to swim, and indeed there are benefits to coasting on someone else's wake. However because you are exerting less effort, it may not be possible to differentiate between getting a free (and easy) ride, and simply swimming slower because you are exerting less effort. If you are drafting and the leader in front is actually slowing down, you may not realize that you are swimming slower than your potential because you're under the impression that it's just the benefit of the "drag."

Sportsmanship

OK, call me old-fashioned, but one of the reasons drafting is illegal in the cycling leg of most triathlons: because it's cheating! It's no different in swimming, although for some reason the governing body of the sport, FINA, has been reluctant to "draft" rules about the controversial strategy. If you are coasting on another athlete's prowess in the water and using it to your advantage, in competition, where is the honor in that? I have lost many races to competitors who draft, and as frustrating as it is I have never succumbed to the pressure of doing so myself. I figure the only worthwhile way to win a race is on my own, without relying on another swimmer. I may win fewer races (especially if I'm competing against draft-loving Australians), but I sleep better at night, thank you very much.

Etiquette

I have seen swimmers get into fights during and after open-water races due to drafting, or what was mistaken to be drafting at the time. When two competitors are racing for a victory side by side, elbows will collide and there will definitely be contact; that is part of the sport. However if a swimmer has drafted off another, banging his feet with every stroke only to overtake him at the finish of a race, there will be ill will and a sense of "You physically hindered my performance" in the second-place finisher. Someone who has worked hard all season only to end up feeling like their race was sabotaged will not be a happy camper, and it can result in unpleasant altercations at the finish line better suited for the boxing ring ...

Of course, no matter what, there will always be advantages to drafting. But

Of course, no matter what, there will always be advantages to drafting. But hopefully, the breakdown above sheds some light on the less-favorable aspects of the practice, and if it convinces just one swimmer to stay off my own feet, I will have done my duty!

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Tip of the Month

When working on drills, don't be afraid to use fins! Some of the drills out there, including the ones I recommend, are very difficult. If you can properly execute the drill using fins, but sink or flounder without them, it's much better to put the fins on then to skip the drill. Eventually, with enough practice, you will be taking the fins off and will have mastered the new skill.

As I have said before, I recommend the shorter fins like Hydrofinz while learning drills.

[Order Hydrofinz Here!](#)



Coming Soon-- Online Videos!

Within 2 weeks, I will have available online videos demonstrating several of the drills I have talked about here and that I teach.

It will be a great tool to supplement your current reading and practicing.

Stay Tuned!

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