



Tri Swim Coach Newsletter

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Update

Dear Tri Swim Coach subscriber,



I have some exciting news. The Tri Swim Coach website has been updated with back issues of the newsletter! Go to <http://triswimcoach.com/tsc/newsArchive.html> and browse past issues of the newsletter in Word format.

Also- this doesn't affect many of you, but I thought I would let you know that I have moved to San Diego, CA and am now coaching in Solana Beach, both masters and age-group swimmers. I will be announcing my first clinic in the area very soon! I am also available for one-on-one lessons if you are in the Southern California area.

In today's issue, I'd like to revisit the previously discussed topic of the importance of stroke counting. As a coach I am often asked, "what is a good number of strokes I should take per length?" I have included an article from one of the top Masters Swim coaches of our time, Emmett Hines, to answer this question in detail.

Next week I will discuss swimming injuries and ways to avoid them.

Enjoy!

Kevin

P.S. Stay tuned for my new Complete Guide to Triathlon Swimming coming out in 2 weeks!

www.TriSwimCoach.com

Article: Cigarette Break? (or I Wanna Keep up with the Big Boys!)

by Coach Emmett Hines 9/94

What's the hardest thing you can do in a workout? Learn a new skill. What saves you the most time and effort over the long haul? Learning new skills. Why do so many people fight the learning process? Why do some people seem to assume that just working their body harder or just swimming more laps is the answer to swimming faster? From a coach's viewpoint it boils down to one of two things - ignorance and/or apathy on the part of the swimmer. If the coach fails to get the message across that stroke improvements are necessary and desirable then ignorance on the the swimmers part is the fault of the coach. However, once the message has been properly placed and reinforced it is up to the swimmer to make consistent efforts to learn and apply new skills. Assuming the workout environment offers opportunities to acquire and fine tune skills the swimmer then assumes responsibility for taking advantage of the environment.



Let me make sure I've done my part in letting you know that stroke improvement is necessary and desirable. In general, swimming skill is reflected by your efficiency as measured in strokes per length.

>> If you take more than 20 freestyle strokes per length of a 25 yard pool you are woefully in need of wholesale stroke repair.

>> If you take more than 15 strokes when swimming at a moderate pace you have a lot of ground to make up in efficiency.

>> If you take fewer than 15 strokes you need to get with your coach to determine how many more strokes you need to trim from your stroke count, if any.

"But Coach, I wanna keep up with the big boys!"

While it's true that you can improve short term speed a bit by just increasing turnover rate - i.e. swimming harder, moving your arms and legs faster - in the long run your potential speed depends more on your efficiency than on your effort level. In general the fastest, most aesthetically pleasing swimmers take the fewest strokes per length and the slowest, ugliest swimmers take the most.

Efficient, long swimming strokes use more and larger muscle masses in the back, torso, hips and upper legs to do a large portion of the work. Short, inefficient strokes utilize mainly smaller arm and shoulder muscles to do the work. When you swim with long strokes you are training all of the muscle mass needed for fast efficient swimming. When you swim with those wimpy, short, choppy strokes you are overtraining small muscle masses and neglecting the larger, stronger muscles to the detriment of your long term potential speed.

Allow me to wax tangential for a moment.

Let's say you are a logging foreman and must train a crew of 20 guys to move 40 ft. long 2000 lb. logs and toss them into a river. These 20 guys must learn to work together to lift the log from a pile without straining any backs, how to work together as a single unit to carry it across uneven ground over to the river bank and how to properly apply all their strength to toss it precisely so that it lands on the shore below so it will roll nicely into the water. They then return to the pile and repeat this process with the next log. This is a relatively complicated task that relies on the coordinated effort of all 20 men. It also requires a fair amount of physical conditioning as each man is required to carry his fair share (100 lbs.) of the load. It has been determined that a well conditioned crew of skilled and coordinated loggers can move 20 logs in 50 minutes allowing for a 10 minute break each hour.

Your job is to get the log tossing operation up to quota quickly. Now, you start the group working and learning. They go very slowly to begin with, learning and refining skills while they increase their conditioning level. There is a lot of trial and error. However, by the third day the group is humming along quickly enough that 5 of the guys are getting tired and ask to sit out and rest. As foreman, do you allow this?

Lets see. If you let these 5 guys sit out they will stop learning skills and coordination and then subvert the conditioning process by smoking cigarettes. When they go back to work they will be further behind in skill development and physical conditioning. This will cause them to fall behind the guys who stuck with it even sooner the next time. By the third time you'll probably be so frustrated you'll just fire those 5. Then you'll have to make due with 15 workers who have to work much harder, want more money because of it and still won't be able to make quota cuz the crew is too small. If you hire 5 new guys they will start out even further behind than the guys you fired.

Learning a proper stroke technique is a lot like training that logging crew. Swimming is a complicated set of actions that relies on the coordinated effort of a lot of muscles. It also requires a certain level of physical conditioning. There is a a lot of trial and error. If you are trying to perfect a long, efficient stroke remember that this technique uses more muscles and muscle fibers to get the job done than a shorter stroke does. Every time you stop applying a long stroke technique and go back to that short stroke stuff its just like letting those 5 (or maybe more) guys go on a cigarette break while the rest of the crew is still training. Rather than calling a break for some of the crew you can 1) slow the work rate down so the whole crew can keep up, thus allowing all members to stay in the learning cycle or 2) put everybody on break at the same time (but instead of letting them smoke cigarettes why not have them do something worthwhile like working on turns or playing Nintendo).

Can we agree that the logging crew that has 20 fully skilled, coordinated and conditioned loggers has greater potential than the crew with only 15?

If you stop worrying about how fast you are going and worry more about how well you are swimming you will be able to get the whole crew skilled, coordinated, conditioned and on the job. This is the only way to maximize your potential for swimming speed down the road.

I realize that it is tempting to blow off the technique stuff and just try to keep up with the people in the next lane. And occasionally it is desirable to cut loose and blow doors just to see how much of your technique improvement is carrying over to your "automatic pilot" system. But the rest of the time you need to keep the whole crew on the job. To turn a skill you are learning into a habit you have developed takes a minimum of 100,000 yards of executing that skill properly. If you practice the skill in a half-assed way for 100,000 yards then you will develop a half-assed habit.

Remember, it is always your choice whether to attempt to improve stroke length or to send part of the crew out on a cigarette break.

This Article first appeared in Schwimmvergnugen, the monthly newsletter of H2Ouston Swims.

Coach Emmett Hines is the head coach of H2Ouston Swims. He has coached competitive Masters swimming in Houston since 1982 and was selected as United States Masters Swimming's Coach of the Year in 1993. Currently he coaches workouts at the University of Texas Health Science Center, the University of Houston and The Houstonian Club. He can be reached for questions or comments at 713-748-SWIM or through the Internet at emmett@usms.org.

[For this and other Masters Swimming articles, click here.](#)

TSC Tip #8

Keep your arm from crossing over.

One of the most common bad habits I see in swimmers is the arm crossing over to the opposite side on the pull. Breathing on your left side results in your right arm crossing over, breathing on your right side results in your left arm crossing. Often times this happens when one goes to breath, but sometimes it's caused just from over-rotating. To avoid this, make sure your head isn't moving with the rest of your body, and try to pull more in a straight line (still bending the elbow) and ending the pull on the same side you started (i.e. right hand slices into the water, pulls back and hand ends up near right hip).



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