
Between **the Lane** Lines

Volume 2010 Issue 6

Congratulations to everyone who participated in the Run for Fun! It's finally getting warm out, so stay hydrated and don't forget the sunscreen!

What the Coach Looks For In a Swim Performance – Published by American Swimming Coaches Association

There are many things a coach is looking for in a swim performance. In general, a coach is looking for these four things: proper attitude, a best time, proper technique, and "winning". Few swimmers achieve all four aspects in a single race. When they do, that is a job well done -- but it is not a "great job" or an "unbelievable job" or a "fantastic job." To use those terms can make a performance greater than it really was and therefore make it more difficult to repeat. We use "mild praise" because we know, and we want everyone else to think and to feel, that there is always room for more improvement. Doing three of the aspects, or two, or even one is cause for some level of praise.

Proper attitude: Coaches look for the "I want to be coached" attitude. Coaches look for swimmers ready to express themselves about their swim in analytical fashion and then be eager to listen to advice. Coaches look for athletes to say "I'll try to do better next time." Sometimes a performance is less than what the athlete was hoping for and the emotional response can be a factor that inhibits looking at the swim objectively and analytically. In such cases the coach may ask the swimmer to warm down for an extended time or to simply take some quiet time before looking at the race. When this happens we look for the athlete resolve to make appropriate changes that will lead to a better performance next time.

A Best Time: A best time usually represents an improvement in endurance, strength, and technique. It measures the swimmer first against themselves and second against the rest of the world. Intermediate through more advanced swimmers above the age of 11 should strive to know their best times.

Proper Technique: How was the start, the strokes, the turns, the pace, the race strategy?

Winning: Winning means racing with someone and finishing ahead. In some cases that means winning the event. However, in every heat there are several races -- there is a race for 1st, there may be a race for 3rd, there may be a race for 5th or even for 7th. Coaches look for swimmers to be in a race, whether it is for 1st or 7th, and to try their best to "win."

The coach expects to speak with each swimmer before and after each swim. Parents, please be sure to direct your child to the coach before the event. When you see your child after the event ask them if they have spoken with the coach about their race and if not, direct them to the coach as soon as possible. The coach should be the last person to talk to the swimmer before the event and the first to talk to the swimmer after the event.

Before the swim the coach will talk to swimmers about technique, pacing, race strategy, and best times. Younger aged swimmers and less experienced swimmers will need direct reminders from the coach but as they age and grow in experience the coach will expect more information coming from the swimmer. Ideally, the coach would like to have the swimmer tell the coach what they plan on doing in their event as a quiz to see how well prepared the swimmer is. After the event the coach will ask them how they viewed their swim, listen to their responses, and then review the swim as the coach saw it.

In this process it is important that parents play the role of emotional support -- give warm towels, and hugs, a "good luck, darling" to your swimmer and ask them to check in with the coach before and after their swim. When the swimmer returns from their post race discussion with the coach it's appropriate to ask them how they thought their swim was as well as to ask what the coach thought of the swim. Please leave the race strategies, breathing patterns, stroke, start and turn reminders, time analysis and race analysis to the coach.

Training Secrets of an Olympic Swimmer

By Natalie Secretan

It doesn't matter how much you train in a day, if you don't perfect your body mechanics, it won't make much of a difference to the finish line.

For Olympic swimmer Ryan Lochte, spending more time on stroke mechanics is more important than the 3 to 5 miles twice a day that he puts into his training.

The trick is to slow things down and focus on what your body is doing. Keeping straight in the water is essential, especially off the wall. Being streamlined for at least 15 meters off each flip turn, Lochte is able to transition into the stroke with increased momentum and this is key.

"The only way to really work on technique is to swim very slowly and really think about every little thing that you're doing. How your body is positioned, what your hips are doing, the positioning of your shoulders and hands and feet."

Body position is also crucial. Lochte recommends using a pull buoy between the legs and concentrate on keeping your stomach above the water during backstroke. Work with the water not against it.

Kicking is Key

Kicking drills are also important to develop strength and body position. The amount of kicking that most elite swimmers do in practice has gone up at least 20 percent in the past few years. Kicking drills will help you build stamina and strength, and improve performance so that you get the most out of your stroke.

That old staple, the kickboard is every swimmer's best friend. In order to build stamina and prevent exhaustion, a swimmer must have strong legs and the kickboard is the ideal fitness tool. It helps with stability because your arms are still and allows you to focus on your legs.

In addition to his practice in the water, Lochte recognizes the benefits of weight training and the strength it adds to his overall performance. He spends three times a week in the gym and focuses on building core strength.

Core Strength

Every sport benefits from building core strength. This is especially true of an elite swimmer who relies on the agility of their torso to keep them balanced and streamlined in the water.

Lochte's core exercises take up to 45 minutes of his workout, but 20 minutes for a recreational swimmer is enough to add power to your performance.

What is Short Course, What is Long Course? - Published by The American Swimming Coaches Association

"One of our pools is 25 yards wide by 50 meters long. Why isn't the pool 25 meters by 50 meters or 25 yards by 50 yards?"

For years the "American Standard Short Course" pool has been a 25 yard pool. Almost all high school pools and most college pools are 25 yards long and most high school and college meets are run as short course meets. USA Swimming Club teams generally swim short course meets from September through March.

The international standard is meters. The Olympics, Pan-American Games, and World Championships are held in 50 meter pools. In this country, most 50 meter pools are outdoors due to the cost of building an indoor 50 meter pool. For that reason our long course season is generally from March through August. As more and more indoor 50 meter pools are being built and as the United States focuses more on international swimming the distinction between the "short course season" and the "long course season" becomes less distinct and more meets are going to the long course standard throughout the year -- with the exception of high school and college swimming which will generally remain short course yards.

At this time (April) many teams are training short course but are preparing to go to long course when the outdoor pool is ready. Some lucky teams are located in a climate and have access to long course pools all year around. And some lucky teams have indoor 50 meter water all year around.

Eventually we all will be at swim meets during the spring and summer that are long course. This will cause some confusion about times. The times will be slower because a 50 meter swim is approximately 5 yards longer than a 50 yard swim. Another factor are turns. There are less turns in long course swimming and generally, turns are faster than swimming -- we can push off the wall faster than we can swim. (Although for some of our swimmers who have not yet mastered a turn, the turning process is slower than swimming!)

Some people attempt to "convert" a short course time to a long course time or visa versa. The conversion factors are not precise due to differences in turns, strokes, and individual's ability to swim the extra distance at speed. Conversions can lead to unrealistic expectations and disappointments, or to a false sense of achievement. For those reasons we do not convert times. We simply say that each swimmer has two sets of best times, one for long course and one for short course.