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# Between **the Lane** Lines

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The end of the long course season is fast approaching. Let's focus on our goals and push hard at every practice!

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## **Don't Fall Into The 'Excuse' Trap - by Craig Townsend**

One of the biggest and easiest traps to fall into, right before a big race or event is to allow your mind to create excuses for you. This is a very common trap, where your mind basically gives you 'permission' to swim a mediocre race. For instance, you might find yourself thinking thoughts such as: "I was sick a few weeks ago, so if I don't swim well, that will be why", or "my coach told me to taper incorrectly, and so if I lose badly, THAT will be to blame".

These sorts of thoughts are generally the kiss of death to your chances of swimming well, and should usually be avoided at all times. Once your mind focuses upon a reason why you may not swim well, it then programs your body's performance, along the lines of "it's OK to swim badly". This usually creates a sub-standard performance. Remember, your mind is the computer which programs your body's swim, and so the thoughts you are thinking before a race are the data which is basically 'programming your result'.

Finding someone to blame (in advance) is a classic negative thought before a race! This comes creates a mindset that says "I'm taking NO responsibility for my own performance, so if I screw up, someone else is to blame!" You often hear these 'gripes' after a race is over about "how everyone else is to blame EXCEPT themselves!", and this attitude gets the swimmer no-where FAST.

Some of these swimmers even use their excuses to attempt to 'psych out' their competitors. Often they'll offer their competitors their excuse right before a race, which is designed to try and reduce the pressure on themselves - and increase the pressure on their competitors! Unfortunately this negative tactic can occasionally work in their favour, but the good news is that in general, excuses simply create bad results. 'Excuse merchants' generally do NOT become champion swimmers!

There will always be exceptions to the rule, however. Strangely enough I've found that around 5% of swimmers actually do swim better when they reduce a little pressure from themselves - and (for this small number of swimmers) an excuse can actually work well for them (however it's always best not to 'advertise' the excuse, as this can quickly create a bad reputation).

Susie O'Neill used the 'quietly negative approach' for many years with great success - but she was highly unusual in this way. You rarely (if ever) hear Ian Thorpe, Inge de Bruijn, Grant Hackett, Lenny Krayzelburg, Michael Klim or Gary Hall Jnr giving excuses for a bad result before a race, they keep their focus quietly positive and upbeat at all times.

But if around 5% of swimmers benefit from excuses, this also means that a whopping 95% of swimmers are much better off focusing upon positive thoughts, rather than looking for 'ways out'. Positive thoughts bring positive results, and negative thoughts bring negative results, always keep this age-old truth in mind. You will usually get what you EXPECT - so make sure you expect the best!

## Flawless Finishes - by Kelsey Savage-Hays

Of course the start matters, the turnover rate counts, and pace strategy shouldn't be overlooked, but in a head-to-head match, it's the finish that makes or breaks a race. Here are four do's and don'ts from Brian Brown, head coach of Asphalt Green Unified Aquatics, to help you hit the wall first.

**Do anticipate.** "The wall shouldn't surprise you," says coach Brown. A strong finish needs as much finessing as any other technique, and the best way to practice is by doing short sprints during workouts while memorizing your race-pace stroke count per lap. Work on reaching for the wall every time with a fully-extended arm.

**Do Count.** For perfect timing, coach Brown emphasizes that the first stroke sets up the last, so starting the breakout stroke with great form means you're more likely to match the stroke count you've practiced, giving you a better idea of where the wall will fall.

**Don't breathe!** Freestylers should take their last gasp before passing under the flags and then keep their head down until they touch the wall. Butterfliers, coach Brown points out, might end up inhaling between the flags and wall (depending on their natural breathing pattern), but they definitely shouldn't breathe on the finishing stroke.

**Do make the last stroke count.** Hit the touchpad energetically at the end of each race to stop the device and make your time official.

**Don't Peek.** "It's a common error for a swimmer who's in the lead to sneak a look at a close contender and end up placing second," says coach Brown. Instead of worrying about the final standings, tuck your head down and aim for the touchpad. Let the scoreboard announce who wins.

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## Keys to success with Tyler Clary - From USA Swimming

Tyler Clary won the silver medal in the 400m IM at the 2009 FINA World Championships. Here are the keys to his success:

**Perseverance:** It's hard to come into every practice and work yourself to exhaustion day in and day out. The perseverance is what helps get you over the hump to your next goal, especially as far as the day-in and day-out routine is concerned. It's also something I have faced with a shoulder problem because I have to work to come back from that just like a tough set in the pool.

**Hard work:** You have to put your nose to the grindstone. If swimming at an elite level was easy, everyone would be doing it. Even being a swimmer at any level, it's not easy, or everyone would be in the pool. On days when you don't feel like it, get over it. Like Kevin Perry used to say when I, or someone would be complaining, "Shut-up and swim!"

**Attention to detail:** Pay attention to every turn you hit, every breakout, every stroke for that matter - and I could list a ton of things such as catch and release and other technique issues. You have to pay attention to all the details all the time, so that when it comes race time, you are on autopilot.

**Intensity:** You have to have that willingness to race. I've said before that I have a hatred for losing. Having that intense feeling makes it a lot easier to put in the hard work you have to put in. You have to see it not just as hard work, but sometimes literally willing yourself to move forward.

**Passion:** If you don't love this sport, why are you doing it? The passion is the only thing that can keep you going at times, and not just for a love of the sport, but for your teammates. Swimming with my team at the University of Michigan is the greatest thing I've ever been a part of. That passion is what gets me through every workout.