



Time To Swim

By Dan Bullock

This time last year Dan Bullock wrote about encouraging people back to the pool because many athletes were taking a well-deserved break after a long race season. This year he's facing the same challenges as a coach whether it's racers taking break, the cold weather or festive distractions keeping his athletes from returning to the pool. Many of us this time of year, especially after a break feel as though we have lost our swim mojo. This month our resident swim coach helps to encourage you back to the pool by offering an array of creative ideas and swim sets to help you regain focus in the water.

We are in a phase I call *technical endurance* which suits the time of year nicely. We are swimming anywhere from 2000-4000m with lots of short technical interruptions right through to longer steadier sets. We use swim toys creatively to challenge and interrupt the 'autopilot' we often are guilty of cruising along on. Ever got to the end of the pool and asked yourself what was I meant to be working on? Too much cruising pace and it's all too easy to stop thinking about what we are supposed to be doing or what we are attempting to achieve from a particular set or drill.

At our sessions this time of year we also perform frequent drills while

static at the wall between lengths, just off the wall for a few metres and even outside of the water on poolside. We find using the lane rope colour zones helps to segment the length and we use this to alter the stroke within the 25 metres. Swimming front crawl when the lane rope is blue and white allows the majority of the length to be swum with a fitness element. We then switch it up in the red zone.

Sample Set

5x300m Front Crawl with 30 seconds rest, changing each 300m as follows:

1. Fists only when in the red zone
2. Legs only when in the red zone
3. No breather in the red zone
4. Add fins but point them downwards in the red zone to feel surplus drag



5. Windscreen wiper scull off the wall. Pivot at the elbow, fingertips to the bottom of the pool, palms to push out to the pool walls then return to facing each other

Another way of making sessions more interesting is to get swimmers into teams. We put swimmers into pairs and perform plank relays. One partner swims in the pool, while the other performs a plank poolside. The aim is to swim 50m as quickly as possible, or slowly if you want your partner to suffer poolside, but losing teams are awarded more poolside planks, so being too slow can backfire.

Time In The Water

It's important to spend time in the water during these winter months. Making things more exciting will always help to encourage you to keep

things consistent. Triathletes in general are good at trying new sessions, challenges and are always happy to use gadgets and toys. This is good because compared to pure swimmers there are fewer things to work on because there's little need for most triathletes to spend time working on starts and turns. Creativity therefore is king. As a coach I hope that I keep swimmers entertained, informed and educated, so they understand why they're doing the sets and drills they're doing.

Another way of mixing things up in the pool is to incorporate the other strokes into sets, or at least elements of them. Try front crawl arms with fly legs to increase your cadence and work the core. Double arm backstroke with a pull buoy works the shoulders in a different alignment, but has none

of the timing issues associated with alternating arms. Breaststroke arms with front crawl legs is a great way to work a continuous leg kick avoiding the often experienced dead spot when front crawl breathing. Mixing things up in this way will also help to lower the incidence of overuse injuries and promote better fitness through cross training.

Recently we had the good fortune to listen to World Champions Keri Ann Payne and Rachel Joyce talk about swimming. I was delighted to hear that both still swim drills on a regular basis as part of their training and, despite being at the top of their game, have issues they're trying to deal with. For Keri it was some wiggly fingers she was trying to work on, while Rachel was found a claw hand has been holding her back and stopping her putting more



time into many of her competitors.

This should serve as a reminder that regardless of your level or stage of your swim development it's unlikely you ever stop performing drills or learning from them. Initially they are an ideal way to break the stroke into smaller parts so a specific area can be improved upon. They encourage good habits and as you improve they can be used to sort bad habits that may have crept in over the season, when you're tired or because of adjusting other areas of your front crawl.

At a more advanced level, more technical skills can break your 'autopilot' swimming where you need high levels of swimming accuracy. Perfect this area and free up more 'bandwidth' to perform great swimming technique for longer. This hopefully remains subconscious while you then process race tactics such as navigation and drafting during the race.

Time Based Training

I often use time based training compared to distance based with my triathlon swimmers because open water swimming is continuous for extended periods of time, and more importantly distance based training is not as specific as it could be. Distance based training in the pool has its limitations. If you know a session is 3,500m in duration, then based on past experiences, you are more likely to be tired at a certain point because that is what happened last time. To fatigue and tire is expected and anticipated, but psychologically you could have gone further if you hadn't known how far you had to cover.

With a time based session there is no expectation of a set distance. No one gets left behind when swimming as a group because everyone finishes at the same time. If you become tired you can cruise and just swim until the time expires.

Putting the onus back onto the group, though, and allowing them to dictate intensity, usually sees greater efforts than if I asked for certain effort levels.

Whether it's a T20 (distance covered in 20 minutes) or our notorious *Pyramid of Pain*, time based swimming offers a different and challenging mindset. With the *Pyramid of Pain* we swim for one minute, rest one minute, swim two minutes, rest one minute, swim three minutes and so on up to a max of six minutes. We then come back down the other side and try to swim further. The challenge always pushes our swimmers and being competitive triathletes they're always ready to take it on.

Another good time based session is using a running style Fartlek session, which crosses over nicely to the pool. This change in pace, speed play style of swimming is always fun. In our sessions we use time-based whistle blows to

change the pace rather than doing it based on distance. This can be also be combined with drill based swimming such as kick drills increasing and decreasing the pace, and turning the float vertical in the water, which is known as tombstone kick.


Time And Motion

Each year I take on a project that will help me relate to the struggle novices have with improving their swim skills. Empathy skills can be lost when you're a coach and still compete because it all comes so easy having done it for so long. In the past I have tried learning Spanish, I even took Salsa lessons. This year I have been learning to run correctly.

After spending so much time working with Vicky Gill on my running I understand what it is like to try and change something which then feels unnatural. Working with Vicky whether it was warming up, doing drills, strength work, hill repeats or strides reminded me that the structure is very similar to the structure of my swim classes. It also reminded me that using my time wisely performing all of the above meant I was able to gain the greatest improvements in the time available. The lesson you can take away as a swimmer is that a session should be properly organised beforehand so you know what you're doing and why you're doing it so you don't waste a second of your pool time.

Time Management

As I am finding out with my running a dedicated route to improvement takes an investment in time. If a swim coach promises you radical gains in what seems like an unfeasibly short period of time, then be concerned. Perhaps the single most important piece of information, especially if you cannot get to a coached session, is to never arrive at the pool empty handed in terms of a plan. A session needs to be written down and taken with you. Don't just rock up and think you can produce something out of your head on the spot.

I have hundreds of main sets floating around in my mind but if I don't have a written plan it usually becomes something simple to remember like 40x100m. As I walk across the car park this becomes 36x100m, it's down to 30x100m as I change and 24x100M by the time I hit the water. Always be armed with a printed session so you know exactly what you're doing, and stick to it, after all the biggest effort is usually getting to the pool rather than the session itself. Invest the time to make progress, give yourself the tools, find the best environment and be creative with your time in the water this winter. 

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