

The World Swimming Coaches Association Newsletter

Vol 10 Issue 4

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What's Next?

FINA has now sent all the Federations a letter stating that they may provide proposals for the governance of FINA that will appear on the final document to be considered at the Special FINA Constitutional Congress in Shanghai next July.

The deadline for these proposals is January 15. Coaches, please make sure that if your country wishes to provide a proposal, it should do one by that time. In particular, support for adding an elected Coach to the Bureau with voice and vote, as the Bureau has now proposed for the Athletes, is critically important to good governance.

The organizations of the Asian Federation, LEN and the Americas, have already submitted a document from those Bureau members that have 100 plus proposals that were agreed upon by all three groups.



John Leonard

FINA Changes Course; Thank the Captain!

By John Leonard

Just as FINA was about to wreck itself on the rocks of autocratic Rule by it's Executive Director and Honorable Secretary, the steering wheel has been turned by it's President and his good influence on the FINA Bureau.

President Julio Maglione has proven himself a friend of the Federations, the coaches and the athletes by arguing the case for Federation input into the proposals to be put forth for next summer's FINA Constitutional Congress. He made his case so strongly during the Bureau Meeting in Uruguay last weekend that an initially oppositional Bureau swung all the way around and unanimously agreed to allow all Federations to contribute ideas for the good governance of the sport.

The Bureau went one better . . . the proposals reportedly will reach the floor of the Congress and a vote without a formal declaration by the Bureau for either support or opposition to each item. (typically every proposal comes forward with a recommendation

from the Bureau, which makes it close to impossible for any that are opposed by the Bureau to get a fair hearing.)

So months after the other two members of the Executive attempted to have only their unique stamp on the Constitution to be put forward to Congress, FINA has regained it's footing for democratic process, under a President who was elected behind a mantra of democracy, transparency and good governance. Thank you Dr. Julio Maglione!

The next step in this process will be the re-submission of items for the Congress from the other Bureau Members and Federations. We know that the Bureau Members of Asia, LEN and the Americas submitted over 100 recommendations that, until this weekend, were doomed to never see the light of day in the FINA Congress. Now, they will be presented, and voted upon by the Federation Members. After a brief and highly concerning detour, FINA democratic process has returned.

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Breaststroke swimming from the hands down - think about it this way.

By Bryan Craig

Just a thought for all coaches, I think about breaststroke in this way, as every coach does things their own way and so what I learned is to take one thing and make it your own.

To start the pull phase of the stroke.

Positioning of the hands

Ok, so let's start with the obvious: fingers together but how?? Thumbs to the top, fingers forward: obvious! But should they be bent or straight; well, a cup holds more water than a plate so there we go; then solves that problem but this is stressful for the fingers so a relaxed position is best neither forced together nor forced wide apart but relaxed.

Next, the most productive position for velocity and full use of the pull, the hands should be one on top of the other but this can be very stressful on shoulders and can interrupt the pull path and play havoc with the leveling of shoulders as you would have one hand below the other. So I advise my swimmers to adopt the prayer position: one thumb overlapping but not gripping the other thumb; this enables the forefingers to be together; the pitch of the hands would be as if you had your palms over the top of a soccer ball, not flat but not too overly curved. This for me is a faster way to adopt the initial catch of the water; why rotate the hands in a 180 when a 45 degree is shorter and faster.

As the shoulders relax the hands dip with thumbs down like breaking an egg from the prayer position, the hands still extending forward and outwards about 6 inches wider than the line of the shoulders, the elbows start to bend as if pulling yourself up on a wall, the elbows stay high but the hands stay in the peripheral vision to the point at which the hands are directly below the elbows, the forearms, hands and elbows come together in a fast sweeping motion, hands staying within the vision, meeting in the middle with elbows under the rib cage as close together as feels comfortable for the swimmer. It is important to stress that the elbows at this point should be within the frame of the body line. Producing the lift of the stroke at this point hands surge forward on or slightly above the surface of the water in the prayer position.

The breath should be taken on the way to the top of the stroke, to finish inhaling right at the highest point in the pull phase.

The Kick.

Frogs legs?

NO!

The kick should be at widest 6 inches either side of shoulders, with the draw the feet up and outwards, making sure that the knees stay down; don't bring them up below the stomach! Kick back and out, snap together, drive the feet to the surface in an upward butterfly motion.

When looking at a breaststroke swimmer from behind them you should be able to see a W leg formation with the middle of the W being the bottom and either outer stick of the W being the legs with the feet turned out and flexed towards your head. A good drill for this is kicking with the pull buoy.

To train Breaststroke.

Think of it as two separate strokes: the kick and the pull. Break it down and train with a broken down stroke (for reasons explained later) with pull count 1,2 as you stretch, kick count 1,2 as you stretch, and continue to pull 1,2 then to kick 1,2.

Why break the stroke that way?

Well, if you train with an overlapping of the kick and pull, when it comes to sprinting that overlap becomes much smaller, creating a stop and go approach to the stroke where you lose all forward propulsion at 1 stage per leg and arm action, giving you a hopping motion like stroke stop stroke stop stroke stop. Meaning that your kick or pull is not being used, usually it's the pull.

Training with a split stroke means that when you come to race and the gap between the pull and kick gets smaller, you are creating constant forward propulsion at all times. This makes your stroke look more fluid through the water and also make sure you are getting maximum propulsion from each pull and kick.

When turning in practice try to relax and count yourself through the process,

Push off the wall,
1, 2
Power pull down
1, 2
Bring arms forward
1
Break out
2

Remember that the first 3 strokes off the dive and turns are more important than any other stroke; they must be fast and very, very strong.

Just an idea, feel free to digest and re-hash your own way.



Hey Coach, One Teaching Style Does Not Fit All!

By Dianne C. Jones, Ed.D.
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As coaches, we all have preferred teaching styles that may or may not match the learning styles of our athletes. In fact, we may not even know the learning styles of our athletes. As a result of our ignorance about the learning needs of our athletes, as well as our inability to communicate in a manner that they can comprehend, we may not be providing all athletes with the fullest opportunity to learn and -- equally important -- perform. The way the coach presents information and feedback impacts the athletes' ability to understand new concepts and acquire new skills and techniques. As such, a key effectiveness strategy for coaches who wish to create a learning relationship that accelerates learning in the athletic domain is to gain a greater understanding of their athletes' learning styles.

Learning styles are the unique way in which each individual begins to concentrate on, process and retain new and difficult information (Dunn, 1984). The objective for the coach, therefore, is to help each athlete capitalize on his/her learning strengths. When instructional strategies match individual learning styles, coaches and athletes have indicated improvement in academic and athletic performance as well as enhanced self-esteem (Brunner & Hill, 1992). In addition there is improved communication and increased understanding of individual differences for the coach. However, in order to accomplish this, the coach must first know the preferred learning styles of his or her athletes so they can align the learning needs of their athletes with the learning objectives in the athletic domain.

Coaches should be aware that most people teach using their preferred mode of learning with little regard for the needs of the learner (Dunn et. all, 1989). Coaches, like teachers, also have a preferred style of instruction, -- a style which may or may not meet the needs of the learner (Pettigrew & Heikkinen, 1985). Many coaches end up teaching based on their experience as athletes. For many coaches, that means that they were taught by the

"sage on the stage" method. The embodiment of this style is the coach who lectured at his/her athletes for the entire practice as if the athletes were merely empty vessels just waiting to be filled up with new knowledge! The irony is, however, that while we use this style the most, lecturing ranks among the least effective strategies for learning and retaining new information!

In society most individuals' preferred learning style is the visual learning style (65%), followed by auditory (30%) and tactile/kinesthetic (5%) (Mind Tools, 2002). Since athletes are students, too, at first blush you would think that their learning style preferences would mirror those of the general population. However, when the author had her coaching education students, the majority of whom are former high school athletes, complete the Barsch Learning Style Inventory (Literacy Partners of Manitoba, 2002A), the results indicated the following:

| LEARNING STYLE | NORMS | UW-W COACHING MINORS | SUBJECTS |
|----------------|-------|----------------------|----------|
| Visual | 65% | 58% | 357 |
| Auditory | 30% | 24% | 147 |
| Kinesthetic | 5% | 18% | 109 |

Individuals have a "most" and "least" preferred mode for learning and each mode has its own strengths and weaknesses. All learners show some combination and degree of all three styles, but one or two styles typically dominate their approach to learning. As such, two athletes may have experienced identical learning experiences and yet one benefits from the experience and one doesn't in terms of translating that learning into performance enhancement. Therefore, the coach needs to be aware that "One learning style does not fit all!"

The visual learner relies on seeing and prefers using written information, notes, diagrams, and charts. The auditory learner, on the other hand, relies on the spoken word and comprehends information by hearing and reading out loud. The kinesthetic learner relies on activities and learns through touching, doing, and 'feeling' the learning. (Literacy Partners of Manitoba, 2002B).

All coaches can use learning style information to enhance their athletes'/teams' performance. According to Coker, (1994) there are five procedures that will help the coach enhance the learning of his or her athletes.

- First, know your learning style because coaches tend to teach using their preferred learning style rather than the athlete's.
- Second, know your athletes' learning style.
- Third, initially use an integrated/eclectic approach to teaching in the athletic domain and then adapt your teaching style to the individual learners.
- Fourth, create cue words to use with the athletes.
- Fifth, create coaching strategies and incorporate cue words and instructional strategies.

Finally, remember that the same teaching strategy will not necessarily have the same degree of effectiveness with all athletes.

So how do you use learning styles in coaching? In order to facilitate the learning styles of athletes the coach should first consider the integrated or eclectic approach to presenting information. In other words, present information by incorporating the visual, verbal and kinesthetic approach. Another strategy is to have your athletes complete a learning styles inventory so that you can more closely match your teaching style to their preferred learning style. Several inventories are available on-line so that practice time does not need to be spent on the activity (Literacy Partners of Manitoba: Barsch Learning Style Inventory 2002A; Solomon & Felder, 1999A).

Formal testing is one of the best ways to determine the dominant learner style of your athletes. A second method to ascertain learning styles is through observation. Specifically, observe what the athlete focuses on and know their tendencies (Coker, 1994). For example, a comment from an athlete to a coach to “show me” would indicate a preference for visual style of learning. Also, listen to the learners’ questions; “I don’t feel it” would indicate a kinesthetic style. Finally, listen to the descriptive words the learner uses. For example, “I see”, would suggest a visual learner. It is also possible to determine an athlete’s learning preference by observing him or her teaching a teammate, since most people will use their preferred mode to teach others.

The coach also needs to develop cue words for the individual perceptual modes for their specific sport. Listed below are some cue words for the visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning styles (Coker, 1994):

VISUAL

- Look
- Watch
- Show
- Demonstrate
- Observe
- Imagine

AUDITORY

- Hear
- Sound
- Repeat

KINESTHETIC

- Perform
- Execute
- Try
- Feel
- Touch
- Move

Example of cue use for a basketball jump shot:

- Visual
 - “See the pads of your fingers facing you.”
- Auditory

- “Hear the sound of the net swishing with good follow-through.”
- Kinesthetic
 - “Feel tension in your forearm as a result of the follow-through.”

Coaching strategies also need to be developed and are often sport-specific. Listed below are some strategies for all three learning strategies (Literacy Partners of Manitoba, 1999B):

VISUAL 65% of the Learners

- Films
- Videos
- Pictures
- Chalkboard
- Notes
- Playbook
- Imagery
- Write
- Diagrams
- Statistics
- List
- Checklist
- Viewing
- Charts
- Cards
- Reading
- Quotes
- Schedules
- Handouts
- Demonstration
- Schedule

AUDITORY 30% of the Learners

- Tapes
- Talk to others
- Lecture
- Cue words
- Encourage
- Listening
- Discussing
- Self-talk
- Repeat
- Listen and respond
- Narrative video
- Music
- Team meeting
- Guest speaker

KINESTHETIC 5% of the Learners

- Take notes
- Study sheets
- Associate with real world

- Examples
- Role Play
- Activities
- Doing
- Move the athlete through the skill
- Goal setting
- Repeat
- Question
- Touching
- Simulations
- Practice
- Mirror/shadow
- Task cards
- Structured hands-on activities
- Assessments
- Guidance

Coaches are constantly searching for methods to improve the athletic performance of their athletes. One method that is often overlooked is the way in which athletes learn and process new information. Another “tool in the toolkit” for coaches is to consider the learning style of their athletes when presenting new information and giving feedback. Failure to individualize the teaching/coaching strategy through which instructions and feedback are presented denies athletes the necessary opportunities to learn in ways that align with how they learn most effectively. As coaches become better able to adapt their style of teaching and coaching to support the learning style needs of their athletes, they create powerful learning relationships with their athletes that not only enhance the learning experience, but also accelerate it. That’s no small thing when considering the length of a typical athletic season coaches have to work with. One of the most important lessons for coaches, however, is that...One teaching style does not fit all!

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A.T. – does it stand for Anaerobic Threshold or a Total Waste of Time?

By Wayne Goldsmith | In *Swimming Coaching*

A.T. – what does it stand for?

Anaerobic Threshold? Yep – for senior athletes, elite swimmers, swimmers 13 years of age and older – absolutely.

For swimmers 12 and under what does A.T. stand for? A Total waste of time.

We’ve all heard the old swimming cliches about kids and training:

“You’ve got to get the miles into the kids.”

“Kids recover fast so you can push them harder more often.”

“Training kids is all about volume – you have to do a lot of work.”

The volume of training appropriate for kids 12 years and under is not for debate here (and let’s be honest, no one really knows the answer to that one anyway) – it’s all about intensity – and by and large, we are pushing young swimmers too hard too often: we are pushing them at or around A.T. for no logical or rational reason.

Whilst the evidence for including some quantity of A.T. work in the training programs of senior swimmers is hard to question, the role of A.T. in the training and development of young swimmers is uncertain at the very least.

Here’s the case for pushing kids 12 and under at A.T. pace for extended periods during swimming training:

1. It looks like they are training hard so everyone feels good about the workout;
2. It keeps the noisy and disruptive kids quiet.
3. Their parents like it because the kids are too tired to argue with them, and they sleep!

Now here’s the case against pushing kids 12 and under at A.T. pace for extended periods during swimming training:

1. They don’t produce a lot of lactate but what they do produce (i.e. by swimming at or above A.T.) they don’t deal with very well;
2. They don’t race over distances requiring high level A.T. adaptation abilities, i.e. most 12 and under swimmers race 50s and 100s;

3. Most of the events they race over are approximately 50% dives, turns, underwater swimming and finishes - i.e. skills based – with only around 50% of race distance being free swimming;
4. Pushing them hard at A.T. for long periods leaves them fatigued and impacts on their ability to swim at max or near speeds in training during speed development training;
5. A.T. is the proverbial metabolic “no man’s land” for swimmers aged 12 and under. It has the effect of young swimmers doing their slow work too fast and their fast work too slow – developing neither endurance or speed and largely wasting their all too valuable water time.

So why do so many coaches spend so much time bashing and belting young swimmers up and down the pool in the A.T. “no man’s land”?

Because it is easy to do!

The easiest way to coach a large team of young swimmers is to push them as hard as possible as often as possible. It keeps them under control. It keeps them working hard. It makes parents think they are getting fitter and stronger. And...just occasionally, a few swimmers get a good result from the too hard / too often approach if they manage to get a lot of rest during their taper and have some underlying sprinting abilities.

This is of course the old “broken-egg” coaching approach. Throw enough eggs against a wall and maybe, just maybe one or two out of a thousand will survive the impact.

Instead of the other 998 eggs lying broken on the ground.... think!! - is this really good coaching????? And we wonder why so many kids drop out of the sport at 13, 14 and 15 years of age.... they just got sick of being made into omelettes!

So weigh it up in your own mind.

Old way – push the kids as hard as possible at or above A.T. in every workout for a few months, taper them for a few days and hope it all comes together on race day or.....

New way – adopt a common sense, practical, sensible approach that helps develop the swimmers’ physical, mental, technical and tactical abilities in a way which is relevant and appropriate to their competition goals.

Hmmmmmm – difficult choice!

Summary and Practical Coaching Tips:

1. When coaching swimmers 12 years of age and under, stick to the simplicity and practicality of the P.A.C.E. model;
2. If in doubt, either work very slow (60-70% speed,

very aerobically, great technique) or very very fast (100% speed, short distances, great technique, lots of recovery) – and always work in an integrated way – i.e. managing training speed plus mental factors plus technique plus skills;

3. Break your old habits! The old “let’s push the kids every workout so their faces are red, their shoulders sore and they are out of breath” days are over! Effective training is about balance, adopting an integrated approach and including physical, mental, technical, tactical development activities in every session.

The easiest way to coach a large team of young swimmers is to push them as hard as possible as often as possible. It keeps them under control. It keeps them working hard.

Response from Dale Neuburger, FINA Vice President to “What will improve swimming in the underdeveloped swimming nations?”

from Dale Neuburger

I read with great interest the “thought piece intended to provoke opinions and discussion” from John Leonard regarding the development of swimming worldwide, and I am pleased to respond with my personal viewpoint.

John...you are exactly right: positive role models, whether athletes or coaches, inspire others. Three of the more interesting examples come from Africa.

As we know, Oussama Mellouli has been one of the best swimmers in the world for almost a decade, and his Olympic gold medal in the 1500 meter freestyle was the first ever achieved by a swimmer from Tunisia. But although the bulk of his training has been in the United States, there are young swimmers in his country who have been inspired by his accomplishments. One such young man is Ahmed Mathlouti, who finished 21st in the 200 freestyle in Rome at age 19, with a sub-1:48.00 performance.

For many years, Salim Iles was the most recognized swimmer to compete for Algeria, and he was a consistent finalist in sprint freestyle races on the international level. He, too, did the bulk of his training outside of his home country in France and the United States, but he inspired the “next wave” of Algerian swimmers, including Nabil Kebab, who had a sub-49.00 performance in the 100 freestyle and Daïd Sofiane who swam under 1:02.00 in the 100 meter breaststroke in Rome.

And, when South Africa athletes – Ryk Neethling, Roland Schoeman, Lyndon Ferns, and Darian Townsend – won the 400 freestyle relay gold medal in Athens, they enabled young swimmers in their country to “dream the impossible dream.” Although the bulk of their training was in the United States, just a few years later, Cameron van der Burgh, Natalie du Toit, and Gerhard Zandberg have established themselves as standouts in international competition.

All six of these swimmers were undoubtedly inspired by their predecessors who had “blazed trails” to achieve international success. And each did so against the odds. Would it have happened anyway? Perhaps, but perhaps not.

And sometimes inspiring swimmers come from other countries, too.

In January 2009, I was in Riyadh performing some work for a Saudi Arabian sports federation. Coincidentally and totally unknown to me, Michael Phelps was appearing at a business conference at the same time, featuring other Olympic heroes like Carl Lewis. Michael graciously agreed to spend a few hours at the pool at the Olympic Training Center, to “meet and greet” young Saudi swimmers.

More than 500 young swimmers showed up at the pool, some of whom came from more than four hours away, traveling by car, through the desert.

Five hundred Saudi kids...six months after Beijing...travelling enormous distances across the desert, just to see Michael for a few minutes.

The power of inspiring athletes knows no reasonable bounds.

And, although there are swimmers who fit the description in your article, there are also many others who use the FINA World Championships or Olympic Games as their inspiration. For some, merely competing will be a lifelong memory; for others, it will be the impetus for continued training and competition. They swim in the same pool as the heroes of our sport, and even if their success is modest, their motivation is great.

And sometimes coaches take tough positions which inspire great performances.

I am reminded of a brash young coach – Dave Kelsheimer – who coached the National Team of the Cayman Islands. Although two “universality” positions were open to Cayman swimmers to compete at the Sydney Olympic Games, he told his swimmers and their parents that none would compete in Sydney unless they achieved a qualifying time. None did, and no Cayman swimmers went to Sydney. It was not only difficult to take such a stance within his club, but he also incurred the wrath of the Cayman Islands Olympic Committee.

Four years later, Cayman had three swimmers with an Olympic “B” qualifying time -- Andrew Mackay, Heather Roffey, and Shaune Fraser. From no qualifiers in the history of Cayman swimming through 2000, to three swimmers at the Athens Olympic Games...that’s real progress!

And, four more years later, Cayman was represented by two athletes – Shaune and Brett Fraser -- who came very close to becoming semi-finalists in Beijing, both finishing in the top 30 in their best events. Shaune has since won three NCAA individual titles, while Brett had several top 16 performances leading to a fifth place finish in 2010 for Coach Gregg Troy’s University of Florida team.

It took the courageous (and risky) stance by a coach to help athletes aspire to results they had never before achieved nor imagined. He passed up a chance to be on the pool deck in Sydney, which would be a dream-come-true for any young coach, in order to make a point and to create a platform for long-term success of the program.

Yes, maybe it would have happened anyway...but, I think not!

Swimming has an abundance of role models, both in and out of the water, as athletes and coaches. We need to tell their stories, chronicle their successes, and celebrate their ability to succeed even when the odds are significantly stacked against them.

Original thought piece, and additional responses, can be found on the WSCA website here: <http://swimmingcoach.org/wsca/improve.htm>