

CUDA VIEWPOINT

BAC COACHES BIT



Who will be on the 2020 Summer State Relays?

The Little Things

Part 1- Long Axis Strokes

PAULA LEE

What's the difference between you as a competitive swimmer and the average recreational swimmer. You guessed it, it's the "little things" that set you apart and make you the swimmer who can do 3,000 to 4,000 yards in practice and get up on the blocks to race the competition.

So, what are the "little things" that make you a better competitive swimmer? Can you name two or three things that set you apart from the rest?

I'm going to talk about these "little things" in three parts: Long axis strokes, short axis and turns. As you read and learn about all the "little things," remember you are an individual. Your strength, your flexibility, your buoyancy will determine what your stroke looks like.

None of you will swim the same or look the same in the water. This is why your coach can look across a pool during a meet warm-up and find you – your stroke is going to be like your signature. It's your swimming signature.



Look for BAC's Top 5 cap designs of all time coming soon!!



What hats will be Thunder Bay 2020?

The Process

JEFF LEE

"Trust the Process."

I've used that phrase more and more the last 10 years of my coaching career. It is the best way to describe what swimmers and families need to do in order to be successful in this sport by the time the goggles are hung up for the last time.

Every swimmer who participates in this sport for any extended amount of time will experience a process. This process and what's involved will be different for every swimmer. None of them are robots. They will all respond differently physically and mentally to every variable that presents itself during the process, so, it's not feasible to compare one child's experience with another's.

If Swimmer A and Swimmer B experience the same variable, the solution for overcoming that variable can and most likely will be different for those two swimmers.

Each swimmer's variables, obstacles and solutions will be different in their process. So, "Trust The Process" becomes "Trust Yourself."

There are some common variables swimmers will experience in the process of becoming the best swimmer they can be. When these variables present themselves and how they are overcome will differ from swimmer to swimmer. The key for each swimmer is to trust themselves to overcome whatever variable presents itself.

Here are some of those common variables each swimmer will face.

Dropping & Adding Time

Every swimmer will experience a season of dropping times and a season of adding times. Handling both are key to the swimmer's process.

The swimmers reading this are saying, "What's so hard in the process about dropping times?"

It's not the actual time improvement that is hard, it's the after effect. The swimmer is going to deal with increased expectations; daily pressure to meet the demands of the new level they have achieved and being able to maintain confidence competing at a higher level. In some cases, reaching a new level is easier than staying there.

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TRAINING

Importance of Dryland Training

CATIE CHANG

Athletes tend to focus their training on what they believe is the sole thing that will help them perform better to reach their end goal: time in the pool. As a former swimmer, and now coach, I have learned that swimming in the water was not the only key to getting better times/results.

Swimmers put in countless hours and laps day in and day out to get better, but what can we work on outside the pool to help benefit you in the long run? Dryland helps focus on the form, technique, and foundational layers that will compliment all the in-water training that is done each season. Overall, dryland training allows you to build a foundation for your skills, focus on improving strength and flexibility to improve body position/alignment in the water and improve on areas that may be weaker to prevent future injuries.

Working on faster intervals, kicking at a faster pace or doing longer and/or harder sets will all help you improve your swimming, but it's important to also focus on foundational skills in and out of the water. To get to a higher level, training the areas of the body not just in the water but also on land will help achieve your goals.

You watch the Olympics and see all these strong and very talented athletes competing at an international level and they excel at what they do. What you don't see is the behind-the-scenes work they put in to get there. In addition to swimming every day, nutrition, hydration, rest, dryland training, and mental training all play a role as well.

Dryland is one area that we can address during each practice and can utilize to help prepare you during the offseason and the actual competition seasons. It supplements what you are doing in the pool to work on areas that cannot always be addressed in the water. For example, you constantly use your core during practice with every turn, push off, streamline, stroke, and finish you complete. If you just did that alone, you would have to constantly think about engaging your core even more than what you are thinking about in the water already. Focusing dryland training on core training, establishing foundational skills/posture and improving areas of weakness by targeting legs, arms, or more cardio improves your skills in the pool. Allowing yourself to focus on the foundations will improve what you think about in the water and change the way you view swimming. The movements with swimming in the water can be replicated on land to enhance your muscles and ability to achieve a better motion without the water. It is a great way to break down the movement and see what needs to be improved.

When you think about freestyle and backstroke, you think about having strong legs and a great pull on each stroke. Eliminate the water and try doing those same motions, and you may get the same result, but you may find there are areas for improvement with how you complete the motion. That is where dryland training becomes essential to strengthen those "little" movements/motions that go unnoticed when you swim in the water.

As coaches, we want to identify that "weakness" and find exercises that will help improve and strengthen those muscles. When coaches talk about how important daily dryland training is in practice, it is to add to what you are doing in the water. We want to help build the foundational layers that will provide each swimmer with a stronger base or postural alignment that will overall benefit their body position in the water and improve your ability to swim more efficiently. Coaches prepare each season with both in-water and on-land training to provide the most effective ways to prepare the body for competition. Everything done on land will translate over to the water and impact the strokes you swim daily.

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Seems so long ago.



BAC Last Chance Invitational Swim Meet @
BFAC is June 27-28, 2020

PROCESS (CONT. FROM PG 1)

Part of the process is dealing with a season of adding times. On the surface it looks like a wasted season. However, these seasons can be the most valuable to a swimmer.

As a coach, I look at each season of a swimmer as a progress report. I look at multiple areas of possible improvement including work ethic, mental approach, confidence levels, attendance, handling competition variables and overall time improvements. So, there rarely is a wasted season no matter what the time board is telling us.

If there are added times at the end of the season, it is often the sport communicating to the swimmer that he/she has not mastered this level of swimming. The swimmer and coach need to figure out what is missing from their process in order to achieve a higher level. The sport will do this throughout their swimming career every time they achieve another level. The goal as a swimmer is to understand that every faster level is going to bring new challenges and variables that need to be foreseen before achieved.

Self-Doubt vs. Self-Confidence

Forty-eight years in this sport as a swimmer/coach has told me the most influential part of a swimmer's process is the progression from self-doubt to unbreakable self-confidence. If a swimmer cannot make this progression, they will never achieve their maximum potential in this sport.

Most swimmers I work with have not made this transition. They spend way too much time on their "failures" and not enough time on their successes. These two sentences can be looked at as cause and effect. I put "failures" in quotes because most swimmers define them with a very narrow view.

"I added a second to my time, I am a failure."

"I got my personal best but did not reach my goal, I am a failure."

"I did my very best but I lost the race, I am a failure."

These are all phrases and thoughts that most swimmers have had. The problem with them is that it's too narrow of a view, Too black and white. This sport lives in gray. (cont. right col.)

PROCESS (CONT. FROM PG 2)

When a swimmer progresses through this part of the process, we as coaches can see it and we will know we are now dealing with a much steeper success curve. The ability to have self-confidence no matter what has happened in the past is a game changer. It also can be very fleeting. As you get faster in this sport your belief in yourself to go to that next level can be tested. Most swimmers believe they are as good as they think they are. They set goals and build confidence to reach a certain level in this sport and once they get to that self-imposed level some will then have self-doubt creep in when trying to reach a level they didn't think they could reach.

So, self-doubt can happen at any time during the process and it can sabotage hard work and commitment overnight. The goal is to build unbreakable self-confidence and believe beyond your own self-imposed limits.

Physical Vessel

The swimmer's body brings numerous variables that will affect each swimmer's physical process through the sport. Starting with each swimmer's inherited build. Is the swimmer tall and lanky or short and stocky? And, what weaknesses does the swimmer have as a result of that build? Each of those weaknesses need to be addressed and countered through the swimmer's training. The tall and lanky swimmers could be dealing with strength issues due to the length of their arms and legs. The longer the lever in the water the more strength needed to produce improvements. The short and stocky swimmers could deal with displacement of water issues by not swimming tall in the water and trying to muscle their way through. Each vessel in the water will have their own variables that will carry their own solutions.

Swimmers need to be careful about modeling solutions off a video of an Olympic swimmer who is 6-foot-7 with a 7-foot wingspan, which is a much different vessel than what our swimmers are working with.

Not to mention once they go through their adolescent growth they will have a completely different vessel in the water which will demand changes to their body positioning and techniques they used prior to that growth. Common issues during this time are losing control of the placement of the swimmer's arms, added weight that changes the shape of the vessel the swimmer is using. This all is part of the process that will take time for each swimmer to adjust based upon those weaknesses and growth. How committed the swimmer is to these adjustments will determine how long it will take and if it will affect time improvements.

Self-Knowledge

The best long-term variable in this process is the self-knowledge each swimmer will learn. This knowledge will last a lifetime. Swimmers will learn about themselves in every competitive situation. As it grows during the process this body of knowledge will help the swimmer master variables that will present themselves daily in practices and when they compete at meets. Learning about yourself is a must in order to train properly, push oneself past self-imposed limits, develop the correct race strategies, know how to compete past the wall of fatigue and know how to prepare to create maximum performance.

As the swimmer gains experience they become better with that knowledge and become more confident about who they are as an athlete and their process. As a result, we start to see more consistency at a higher level of swimming in practices and meets.

It starts with identifying weaknesses by looking at disappointing performances by self-examining what you could have done better. Did you back down from the wall of fatigue? Did you not race to your personality? Did you not prepare for your swim physically or mentally the way you need to in order to perform? Did you not approach your training properly to maximize your session? These are all questions that come up during the process and all affect the performance of the swimmer.

Conclusion

The process of the swimmer's career is an up-and-down experience. But, it's one that continues to progress in many ways regardless of the results on the surface. The process can be very involved and it shows that swimmers' successes do not just happen by showing up to practice every day or is it just handed to a swimmer because they are older or they desire success. Swimmers that "Trust the Process" and are willing to face their variables and weaknesses with hard work and commitment will benefit with successes in the water and out for a lifetime.



BFAC just sitting there waiting for us!!

LITTLE THINGS (CONT. FROM PG 1)

Freestyle

Let's talk about what you can do to turn your freestyle into a stroke that is best for training and racing and gives you a way to swim with the least resistance. One of the ways every swimmer can make the biggest difference in their stroke is to work on body position. You should be swimming "in the water" and not "on top of the water."

You can control this body positioning with your head position. The water will hit the top of your head when you have it in the right position. As you're sitting there, sit upright, shoulders back. Now tuck your chin in a little and stretch out the back of your neck. This is the feeling you should have while swimming freestyle, and actually every competitive stroke you swim. Practice this while you're sitting around the next few weeks and when you get back in the water you will have conditioned this movement into your muscle memory. This little correction in your freestyle will help you swim in the water and not on top of the water.

The next "little thing" that helps your freestyle in a big way is the rotation of your stroke and the reason freestyle is called a long axis stroke. It's as if there is a pole going through the center of your body and you rotate around the pole. The control of your rotation is one of the most difficult things to learn because your legs and core play a big part in the success of your rotation. Yep, this is why we do dryland to build those core muscles to help you control your body movement in the water. Moving the hips and shoulders together requires this core strength, but you also need control of your legs with your kick. A small kick will help to keep your rotation tight, moving you in the forward motion you wish to go with your freestyle. This "little thing" of controlling your kick will help your rotation a lot when you return to the water. Do those dry-land flutter kicks and it will help your core strength and kicking control.

So far, I have not mentioned your arms and the role they play with your freestyle, not because they are not important but because they will reflect the movement of your body. Think about it. When you lift your arm out of the water it will be easier to have that elbow high if your shoulder rotates with your hip and you lift your shoulder slightly out of the water.

This "little thing" will also help you drop the opposite shoulder and have your underwater pull be under your body and not off to the side. This slight rotation also helps with what?

Breathing you say? You're right!

The "little thing" of finding the best time to breathe with your stroke is so important. You will no longer need to lift your head to breathe, your breathing will be a natural part of your stroke.

The next "little thing" with your freestyle stroke is the easiest of all, the length of your stroke. Do you reach out as far as you can before initiating your pull? This is important for a number of reasons.

First, if you reach out as far as you can you are helping your rotation and you will be able to finish your pull with the other hand past your hips. Think of the three-second glide drill. This drill is the freestyle pull and reach with maybe a .half-second glide instead of the three-second glide like the drill. The fewer strokes you do, the less tired you will be and the further you will be able to swim.

Finally, let's talk about that underwater pull. Your hand enters the water under the surface about four inches (another "little thing" to think about). At this point think about your hand as a shovel digging down into the water. The handle of that shovel is your elbow, keeping your elbow high and letting your upper arm do the pulling. This "little thing" takes strength and will be something that you will need to continue to work on throughout your swimming career. The results however will be noticeable and rewarding in the long run. Try swimming in front of a mirror to replicate this motion or lay on your bed and try moving your water bottle with your palm from the entry of your stroke to the finish of your stroke.

Backstroke

Swimming on your back is probably the most unnatural position to humans. To get it right you need to relax and think about floating on your back and what keeps you afloat. Do you sink? What happens when you bring your arms over your head to a streamline? Does that help you float? How do you create

the least resistance while swimming? Let's talk about the "little things" that will help you swim a better backstroke.

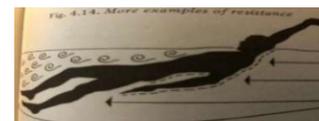
Many of the principals of backstroke are exactly the same as freestyle. You will rotate the same, your kick is the same motion, you want your body and head position to be "in the water" not "on top" and your arms move opposite each other like freestyle.

So, let's talk about the differences in the two strokes and the "little things" you can work on to make your backstroke better.

First "little thing" that makes a big difference is where your hand enters the water and how it enters the water. Think of a clock and where the hands are (I know no one knows what hands on a clock are anymore).

If your head is at 12 your hands should enter the water at 11 and 1 o'clock. Along with this your hand should enter the water with a stretching motion and pinky down. The stretch helps you rotate right into your underwater pull which again should be with your upper arm, with your elbow bent toward the bottom of the pool. One last "little thing" ... on the finish of your stroke, you need to finish with a strong push-like motion and snap your hand lifting the thumb and arm out of the water quickly. This effort will help with the tempo of your stroke and keep you moving through the water.

Like Freestyle we always want to think about swimming backstroke with the least amount of resistance. When we get back in the water this will be our focus along with applying all of the "little things" I've talked about. Below is a diagram of what the wrong head position does to your stroke and how resistance can affect your speed.



In Summary

Swimming freestyle and backstroke are about putting together all of the "little things" at the same time, which can be overwhelming if the swimmer does not work on the "little things" in practice. By practicing all of the "little things" these techniques and motions become a part of the swimmer's muscle memory. Then when the swimmer enters a race they can put their efforts into racing and not thinking so much about their stroke.

DRYLAND TRAINING (CONT. FROM PG 2)

Flexibility is an important area that can tend to get missed when it comes to practice. Your body needs to warm up properly and by allowing the muscles to stretch and "warm-up" you are providing your body with great benefits to have a better practice or be better prepared for a race because your muscles are not tight. This can be accomplished with a few quick simple stretches before you start practice. As you continue to gain flexibility in all areas, this will help improve your kick, streamlines, turns, rotation, and your ability to lengthen your body in the water to be more effective.

Swimming is not always about the fastest and hardest strokes in the water, but also about the way that you swim. Building the foundation with stretching will lengthen your overall body position in the water and make it easier with less effort in a way that will allow you to swim more efficiently and improve without training to the max.

Injuries are another common area that coaches try to prevent with dryland training. In the water, you are constantly swimming with repetitive motions and if not done properly those motions can eventually lead to injury if not done properly. Dryland training can unearth flaws in those motions, making it a great way to avoid injuries by protecting joints and creating a strong foundation.

If you think about any injuries that athletes endure, they tend to have extensive rehabilitation afterward to protect and rebuild the muscles/ligaments around that injury to prevent it from happening again. Building up those muscles/ligaments around the shoulders, back, core, and ankles will also help prevent injuries in the future. You will feel stronger, have better alignment, and feel better in general because your body is getting the stretching/exercise that it needs to ensure better growth in the future.

During dryland currently, you notice that a lot of the dryland does not include heavy weights. This is important because your body is still growing and by adding increased weight you will prevent the muscles from growing further. Coaches typically do not recommend weight-based strength training until it seems appropriate, and should therefore be discussed individually with your head coach. By starting with body weight-based you are going off what you know your body can already handle and build the layers before adding more on.

Shoulder injuries tend to be relatively common for swimmers, and you notice a lot of exercises in dryland involve protecting those shoulders with ways to build up those joints. However, dryland training is important to take seriously during practice, because it can just as easily cause an injury if someone is not paying attention. During practice, we as coaches, tend to provide feedback or modifications based on the swimmer to make sure that you are protecting yourself from injuries from improper form or technique. Just like coaches correct technique and form in the water, it is the same on land which is easier to be seen with each exercise motion and allows us to prevent injuries in the long run.

Dryland is not a cookie-cutter type of exercise, it is specifically designed by the coaches to address areas of weakness and improve on stronger areas by providing increased training. A lot of planning goes into these exercises and the movement behind each exercise is considered before being added to the dryland routine.

As a swimmer, I noticed there were key exercises each season that were always the same. To get better, there had to be variety in what was being presented in workouts. The variety allows us to target all important areas when swimming and focus on the overall foundation that you as a swimmer need to be more efficient and stronger in the water.

Once you build a stronger foundation, the increased challenges/ harder exercises are provided to build an even stronger layer on top of the existing strong foundation. With all that being said, it is important to individualize each exercise as necessary to prevent injuries and to match the swimmers' level in and out of the water. No matter the age, the concept behind dryland training does not change. It only changes the type of exercises completed and the level of difficulty behind each exercise as to what the targeted muscle group is.

Overall, dryland can be used to develop those muscles that may need a little more help to have a more powerful catch in the water, or stronger push-offs each wall to increase the distance underwater, or having more ankle flexibility with each dolphin kick to get a little bit more off each kick. There are many wonderful benefits to dryland training and it is an amazing addition to what you already do in the water.

