

BAC VIEWPOINT



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THE ELITE SWIMMER

BY JEFF LEE



What does an elite swimmer look like? What do they do? How do they act?

In order to answer those questions, we must start with a definition of "elite": Maximizing your talent in order to display your maximum potential.

There are three key components to developing the elite swimmer that's in you. All three need to be worked on each day in order to master them and put them to use. These components also will reach beyond swimming to help you bring excellence to everything you do. When you read these components, think about how you can improve upon what you do daily in order to master each one.

Unbreakable Confidence

We can believe or not believe in ourselves. It's a decision we make every day. It becomes a question of how we define ourselves. Do you define yourself by your successes or failures? That answer goes a long way in determining the confidence you have in yourself.

Most swimmers spend way too much time on their "failures." I put failures in quotes because I have a tough time calling them failures because I believe they are progress reports until their ultimate success happens. It's only a failure if the swimmer did not try. A swimmer will spend days, weeks, seasons on their "failures." Thinking about them so much that they actually define themselves by those moments. A swimmer will spend very little time on their

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successes, usually until their next self-defined "failure." You need to flip this in order to achieve unbreakable confidence. Swimmers need to spend most of their mental time on their successes. You want to learn from your "failures" but then move on and get back to what is going to make you great, your successes. If you cannot make that flip, then you will not be elite.

Everyday Purpose

No days off!! Every day have a purpose about what you are doing to make yourself elite. No garbage yards at These are examples of common areas where swimmers need to improve if they want to become elite. An elite swimmer is in championship mode every day. They look at it as an opportunity to get closer to their ultimate success/goal. No wasted

moments, sets, practices or meets. The mentality is if you are not getting better, you're getting worse. There is no such thing as staying where you are at until you are ready to get better. Until you can adopt that level of purpose to your swimming then it's a back-and-forth tug of war between achieving your goals and watching them fade away. You've heard practice makes perfect. (cont. Pg4)

-THE COACHES' BIT-



Small drag in streamlined position



Large drag in unstreamlined position



THE LITTLE THINGS

PART III – TURNS (BY PAULA LEE)

Parts 1 & 2 focused on the four competitive strokes. Now I'm switching focus to what is 30 to 50 percent of your race, which is the turns and starts. I will try to give you things to work on on land and what you should feel when back in the water. Remember your own buoyancy, flexibility and strength will determine your individual turns, and you will put your own signature on the start and turns in your race.

Freestyle & Backstroke Turn

I'll start with the "little things" about the freestyle turn which will hold true in one way or another to all of the other turns. Your speed when approaching the wall will determine the speed of your turn. It's as simple as that, if you slow down approaching the wall or hesitate, it will show in your turn. The next "little thing" when approaching the wall goes back to head position.

You should not change your head position when approaching the wall. So, what do you look for, how do you know where the wall is? The secret is where to look. Since your head is down you should be looking at the corner of where the wall and bottom of the pool come together. That will be your clue of where the wall is for your turn.

The turn is a tight somersault. To practice this on land lay on your back and grab your knees and pull them in to your chest. Staying as tight as you can rock back and forth. Notice the difference if you point your toes or flatten your feet, does this affect your speed? It's the "little thing" of pointing your toes that will help you spin faster on your turn.

You have most likely noticed that when you do a proper somersault and your feet hit the wall you will be in a position to push off the wall on your

back. This position is perfect for your backstroke turn, but how does this evolve into your freestyle? It's the "little thing" of the position of your feet. As you flip you will have one foot be a little lower on the wall, and that side will be the side you turn to and begin your first freestyle stroke. The energy off the wall, getting into your streamline quickly to keep your resistance/drag down, is equally important. Into that first breakout stroke that I think you will know what the rule is, No Breathing! You can have the fastest turn in the pool with the best streamline but if you breathe your first stroke you kill your forward momentum. Keep your head down and

streamline as tight as you can with your dolphin kick.

Your backstroke turn is exactly the same as what was described above, with the exception that the approach to the wall is on your back. So the "little thing" that will make your backstroke turn great is

knowing how many strokes you will take before you turn to your stomach and flip. I will never say this is easy, because as age-group and junior-age swimmers you are constantly growing so your stroke count will keep changing.

The other thing that affects your stroke count is your speed, which is why when you get into a meet you might notice that your stroke count is different than what you have been doing in practice. Best thing to do to correct this is to always do turns at full speed when we practice turns as a part of practice or when you're sprinting in practice.

Breaststroke & Butterfly Turns

Think of these two turns as if you are doing a backward somersault instead of the forward somersault.

(cont. Pg3)

You can have the fastest turn in the pool with the best streamline but if you breathe your first stroke you kill your forward momentum.

-THE COACHES' BIT-

LITTLE THINGS

(CONT. PG2)

Your approach to the wall should be fast like every turn discussed so far. The difference is you are touching the wall with two hands. The two-hand touch is the easiest little thing you can work on in practice. Try not to get lazy with the two hands on the wall. Your muscles will remember this and automatically touch with one hand in a race if that's what you have practiced.

As you turn another "little thing" will be to stay as low as possible, try not to lift up out of the water. Think of the placement of your arms as you turn, if you turn to the left the left arm should stay low after your turn. The right arm will be closer to the surface as you turn and go into your streamline push off the wall.

If you have done a butterfly turn the streamline off the wall should be joined with your dolphin kick into your first stroke and - you guessed it - no breathing your first stroke. Your breaststroke turn will have a breaststroke pullout into swimming. The timing of this is what you will work on at practice. The "little thing" you can do to help get the timing right is to count. Push off the wall count one, two, do your strong underwater pullout, count one, two, do your breaststroke kick to bring you to the surface and then swim. You may breathe your first stroke while trying to keep the speed you have off the wall.

In Summary

Competitive turns are about putting together all of the "little things" at the same time, which need to be worked on during practice. By practicing all of the "little things," these techniques and motions become 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 turns.

Finally, the process of learning the turns and perfecting technique is an ongoing challenge of each swimmer no matter how talented they become in the sport. Learning the basics and little things goes a long way in each swimmers' journey with the sport of swimming and all that is involved.



Q & A:

COLLEGE SWIMMING

(BY CATIE CHANG)

Competitive swimming has been in my DNA since I was a little girl. I thrived on competition and the intensity of the training as I got older. Deciding to swim beyond my high school years seemed like a no-brainer for me. I was dedicated, passionate, willing to leave home and ready to be on my own for once. Looking back, I am very glad I chose to swim competitively during college and that it also became some of the best experiences of my life. Not only was I able to train and compete for a Division I school in a sport that I loved, but I learned more about myself in those four years than I ever thought possible because of the team I became a part of and the atmosphere that I was surrounded by. College swimming allowed me to train and compete in many different events, provide me with experiences that I will never forget, and in the end, it prepared me for the next step in my life post-graduation.

Why swim in College?

Swimming in college gives you the chance to have a new experience that goes beyond your teenage years of swimming. There is a new level of competition and team competitiveness compared to the high school teams and club teams. There is the opportunity for traveling, increased strength training, more competition, and more specific training toward your strengths than what you can do during club swimming. As a college swimmer, you are more specialized in what you can offer to the team and how you can bring your strengths to the conference meet at the end of the season. All of this was involved in my decision to swim in college, but at the end of the day, when I was a senior in high school, I also knew I was not ready to hang up my suit and goggles just yet. I wanted more and I knew that there was a team out there that would be able to provide that for me.

Through my college experience I developed a stronger work ethic, dedication, passion, reliability, and accountability.

(cont. Pg4)

BARRAJUDA
AQUATICS CLUB

-THE COACHES' BIT-

Q & A:

COLLEGE SWIMMING (CONT. PG3)



You are the sole person that can decide how the season turns out by the work you put in, and in college there is no time to slack on anything. The team will hold you accountable, your coaches will, and you have to hold yourself accountable as well. It helps to have that support and “team/community” aspect that helps lift you at your highest points and your lows as well.

When you miss home, they are there to help you through it, and when things are going amazingly well, they are there to cheer you along the way. You build a bond that you can never imagine and memories that you will have forever. The team training, meets, and all the other stuff will come and go, but the memories last a lifetime. I don't recall every single workout we did, but I remember all the traveling, the meets, training trips, the experience of being a part of something

bigger, and just leaving my own little “footprint” on the swimming program.

How did you pick the schools to visit?

When it came to deciding what schools to talk to, or which ones I was interested in, I let them come to me. I knew what I was interested in, but there are so many swimming programs out there from Division I to Division III, that you have to be open-minded to all the options. I received letters, emails and phone calls from various schools, all offering similar things, but in the end, you have to decide what you want to accomplish in college academically as well as athletically.

There are so many schools to choose from, but in the end, you have to think about what is the best fit academically and athletically if that is what you choose to do.

Academics are crucial because that is what you will have a degree in at the end of the four years, so think about both aspects in the process and ask those questions during the recruiting process to help make your decision.

What was the recruiting process like?

Once it was time for college coaches to recruit seniors, there were plenty of phone calls and emails to go through. There was a lot to think about, and tons of daydreaming about gorgeous campuses and what each school had to offer. You get to think about what career path you want to head down. I set up a list of questions that I would make sure to have answered during my conversations with the recruiting coaches of each team.

I wanted to know the facts and what they were able to offer me based on my swimming events and times. (cont. Pg5)

THE ELITE SWIMMER

(CONT. PG1)

It's wrong, it should be perfect practice makes perfect. It's about holding yourself to a higher level and bringing an everyday purpose that will lead to being elite.

Importance to Details

This goes together with bringing an everyday purpose. It's about not overlooking the little things that make elite swimmers elite. It's not just about working hard in sets or a race, doing all turns legal at practice or finishing at the wall on every swim in practice. It is about placing an importance on these things every day so they become a part of the reason why a swimmer becomes elite.

Every turn, every streamline, every finish at practice done with importance. The easy tasks sometimes can be the hardest to do consistently because the importance to do it is not there. For swimmers who are dealing with tenths, sometimes hundredths of a second determining their successes the easy, little tasks need to be done with importance.

It's no different in races. Swimmers will need to compete in less than motivating environments at times. Placing an importance on those races will be crucial for success. Racing when there is no competition in the water, racing at a meet with no championship excitement or racing in a meet right after your hardest week of training. These are all circumstances that swimmers face and need to overcome. The importance of the race inside the swimmer's head goes a long way toward success. Every race is an opportunity to be special. It's performance time. Some of the best races a swimmer will have will be ones they never expected. Nobody knows when a great performance is about to happen. So, swimmers need to be ready every race.

Elite swimmers are ready to race today. Are you?

-THE COACHES' BIT-

Q & A: COLLEGE SWIMMING (CONT. PG4)

It was an interview in a way to see how you fit in with their team, but also to see if they fit what you are wanting as well. You have to be honest with yourself about who you are and what you want when you swim. Some teams are so big that they have travel squads and it can get very competitive and stressful.

You have to know what your limits are as well, but how much you value yourself and your swimming. You have to ask the tough questions, especially about financial aid, scholarships for academics or swimming. Overall, it is important to know what the coach has to offer, what the program offers, and what's available academically. Being part of a team, you have to see if you will be a good fit for them just as much as they want to see how you fit with their team when you visit.

Sit down and have a conversation with the coach about your goals and what you have been doing in your senior year of swimming and they can help you understand what they can do for you. There is a lot to think about during the recruiting process, but you have to go with your gut and what you think is best for you in the long run.

How did you know what recruiting trips to take?

I narrowed down the schools that I was interested in and then decided if I wanted to take unofficial visits before committing to an official visit. This helped me narrow down my list, because some of the unofficial trips that I took, saved me from using an official visit to a school that I was not interested in. I took many campus tours, met with different swim coaches, and in the end, I narrowed my list down to four: University of Wyoming, University of Richmond, University of Nebraska and University of Connecticut; all Division I schools. You're allowed to make five official visits, but I only took those four.

After narrowing down my list I was able to start to ask more questions about how I would fit into the team/program based on my events/talents. All recruiting trips were then set up. You are allowed to visit for 48 hours at each campus to see what it would be like to be a college athlete for that program. Most of my decision to take an official visit was based on the emails, phone calls, communication with coaches, and then my visiting of other campuses that allowed me to decide what I was interested in.

What was a typical recruiting trip like?

All recruiting trips have a similar agenda when you are scheduled to visit them. You are allowed to be on campus for 48 hours, typically any flight information or transportation is arranged by them for you to visit. During your visit, you are assigned a "host" on the team that you will stay with during your visit and will take you places around campus. You can meet other recruits from all over the country and then meet the team that you are visiting.

The most important thing to remember when you are on a recruiting trip is, "Can you see yourself here for the next four years?" Yes, that can be a difficult question to answer, but it gives you the perspective of what you will be doing during your next four years on that team.

Typically, each visit has some sort of dual meet going on to watch how the team competes. You can visit the campus, attend some classes, eat in the dining halls, and live in the dorms. It is a mini college snapshot in 48 hours. The team typically organized some sort of dinner with hosts and recruits and the coaches to get to know everyone better and learn more about the program/feedback about your trip. During some visits, you can attend other sporting events based on the weekend.

I was able to attend football games during all four of my visits which was great because they were great bonding experiences. You are given time to train at the pool when you need to, but coaches are not allowed to watch your swimming. However, your hosts are there to help you as you are on your visit, and the coaches will ask for their opinion on how you will fit into the team/what you were like/what were your thoughts on the trip. It is important to be honest during your trip with the coaches and what you are looking for. Sometimes, they are all super great trips and very fun, but in the end, can you see yourself there for four years?

How do you know when it is the right one for you?

Answering the question of, "Can you see yourself there for four years?", you have to take everything in and see what you like/dislike about each visit and campus. They can all be the same or they can vary greatly. After my first recruiting visit to Wyoming, I was super excited and thought that was it, but I knew I had three more recruiting trips. Typically trips are booked back-to-back based on your schedule and what the school can offer.

In between trips, you are still answering phone calls/emails with the other programs you are going to visit and still reflecting on the last trip you just took and still training and going to school. There is a lot to think about. Breaking down each trip and what you feel you are looking for is very helpful in the process. In the end, I had taken three of the four trips and was about to take my last trip. I was set on one school in particular and had visited that school for two unofficial visits and one official visit.

With one recruiting trip left, I was unsure of how it would go. Once I got to Connecticut, I had a funny feeling in my stomach. Everything seemed to slow down in a way and the trip just seemed different than the rest. I was able to experience the first day by taking it all in, but I knew that this was the school I wanted to be at for the next four years. The trip felt great and the team was very welcoming, and after meeting with the head coach individually and discussing how it was going, he gave me the best advice ever.

He said, "Think of the rest of your trip as if you are not on a recruiting trip, think of it as you are part of the team and see how it feels for you." In the end, this is what ended up making my decision that much easier.

I came home and discussed everything with my parents and what the coach was willing to offer me for scholarship and if this was really what I wanted compared to the other school I was previously dead set on. Yes, UConn was very far away, my parents could not visit as often, and it was going to be a lot of growing on my own. In the end, I decided that UConn was the school for me, and I committed later that week to the coach and signed the paper for my scholarship within two weeks. It was crazy and a whirlwind, but in the end, my gut told me that this was where I was meant to be and it all worked out for the best. I had the best four years of my life and experienced so much in my time there.

Advice for anyone thinking about swimming in college?

My best advice for anyone thinking about swimming in college would be to trust your gut. In the end, you know when you want to continue with your swimming career and be realistic about how it will all come together. When you feel like there is more swimming to be done and you want to experience that in your college life with the academics, you are committing to more than just the academic experience, but being part of something bigger. It is up to you on how you make the decision and what you feel like is best for you. Do what is right for you and make the decision with your parents' input of course, but know that you have to decide for you!

You are the one who will be going through the experience, so take in the unofficial campus visits, do your research, watch the teams compete if you get the chance, and then decide what you feel is the best environment for you to grow in and that feels right for you to stay true to you.