LANE PLACE   TIME   *Fair-Play*

Our Dibilitating Fascination with Race Times

By Jeff Lee

Most swimmers and parents believe that the time is the only measure of a race.

I have seen countless swimmers over my 30 years of coaching treating any times that were not personal bests as if it meant they were a failure. For some swimmers, that attitude will become debilitating to their careers.

The problem is easy to identify. Most swimmers and parents believe that the time is the only measure of a race. Good time equals good race, bad time equals bad race. As a coach I have heard too many times a swimmer coming back from a race and declaring that it was all crap.

I have also heard too many times that because the time is not a personal best then it was not worth doing at all. But racing is not that simple and not that black and white.

Race Conditions

Somehow this is overlooked by swimmers when it is convenient for them to forget. You cannot compare a race that is one hour after warmups in a fast pool with tons of competition, with a race in a slow pool held 15 minutes after you just did a 200, and where you are a half a length ahead or behind the swimmers in your heat. Radically different conditions will lead to radically different results. Yet that gets forgotten in the hunt for a best time in every race.

Remember that not all meets are about the times on the board. Meets during the season are there to fine tune you for your championship meets.

The Little Things Part VI- Practice

Written by Paula Lee

Practice: How can you do it better? Do you know how to practice? Do you know the unsaid rules of practice?

Practice Preparation

Your attitude, mood and approach to practice really does make a difference.

When you make daily goals and have expectations for the practice you will have a better practice. These goals can be small, like making a promise to yourself to work on turns or streamlines. Whatever you can do to prepare yourself mentally and physically for practice will help you have a good practice.

Start with what makes you happy, a song, a dance or a friend at practice you are looking forward to seeing again. Then take that attitude forward to preparing yourself mentally and physically for practice. Last week you learned how important dynamic stretching and warm-ups are but remember doing them with the right approach is also important.

Practice Etiquette

There are unspoken rules of practice that make a practice better for everyone, including you! Start with warm-up. Do you do it or skip it? What's the message you send when you skip it, or swim warm-up like it's a race? You're only cheating yourself by not warming up properly and preparing yourself for practice.

Working with your lane mates will also help in having a good practice. Here's a few hints: Start when instructed, stay 5 seconds apart, don't hang on someone's feet and let everyone in the lane finish to the wall. Other ways you can show your lane mates that you respect them is by letting them pass you if they are faster, and by not using their equipment.

Goal Setting

GOAL SETTING
S SPECIFIC
M MEASURABLE
A ATTAINABLE
R RELEVANT
T TIME-BOUND

You can think about setting goals using this method: SMART goals.

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Goal Setting

Written by Catie Chang

Goal-setting is important to understanding what you are working toward each day. When you have good days and bad days, they both contribute to your end goal.

S: Specific

When setting goals, you want to be as specific as possible. Just saying, "I want to get faster in butterfly" is not enough to

M: Measurable

You must be able to tell if you are meeting your goal. If you do not have a specific time, or cut that you want to achieve, then you are not sure if you are meeting the goal.

Example: I want to be faster than 1:02 in the 100-yard butterfly.

A: Attainable

Is your goal achievable and attainable? Meaning, are you able to actually complete this goal in the time frame you are setting? You may have to adjust the goal based on your circumstances. There are some things we cannot control, like injuries or pandemics that keep us from training or competing. Do not stop here just because things may have derailed a bit. Adjust your goal based on the time you have to make it more attainable in the future.

R: Realistic

You must be honest and realistic with yourself in what you want to achieve.

When you know what you are working toward, it gives more purpose/drive to what you do in practice.

There are many goals/steps that come before the result you wish to achieve. When you know what you are working toward, it gives more purpose/drive to what you do in practice. You can think about setting goals using this method: SMART goals.

really describe what you want to achieve. This means focusing on a stroke, event, and time that you want will help motivate you more.

Example: Drop 2 seconds in the 100-yard butterfly.
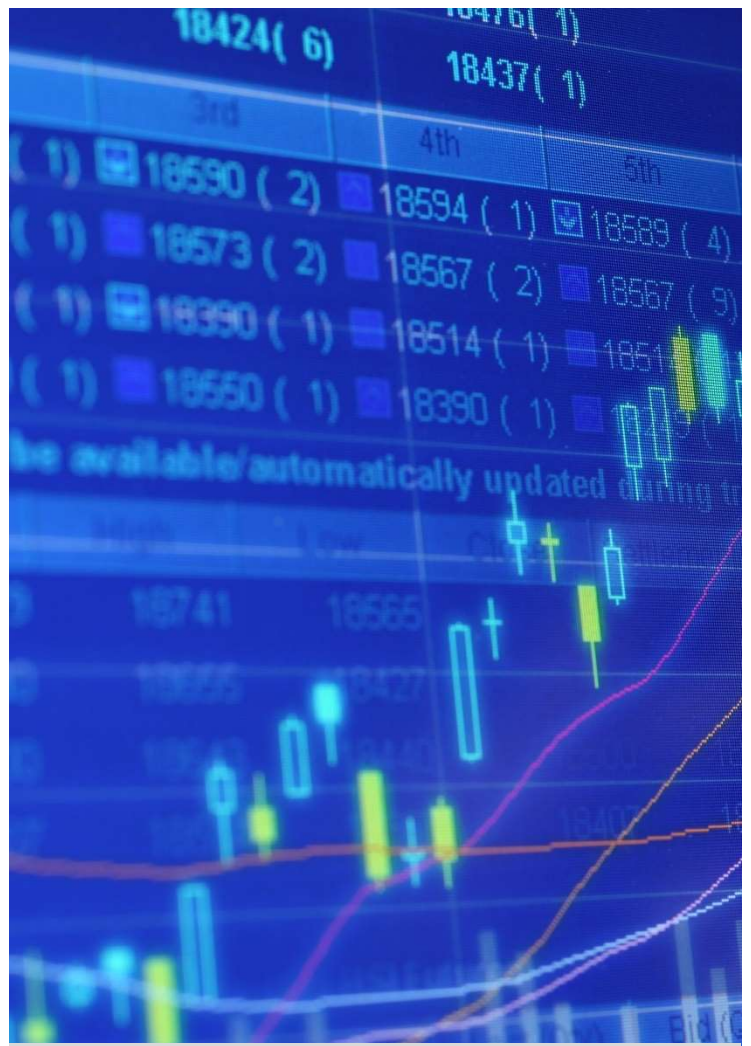
(Cont. on Pg3)

Photo Caption

*Dibilitating Fascination...**cont from Pg1*

Meet Preparation

That leads me to training meets versus big meets. The important thing here is that times done at a big meet where the swimmer is tapered and sometimes shaved, are extremely hard to duplicate at a training meet.

An example of this happens every year with our high school girls in the winter. They swim their tapered and shaved high school section meet in mid-November. They put up great personal best times. Then they swim in their first meet back from high school anywhere from 4 to 8 weeks after their high school taper meet. They will swim close to their best times, but they may be off a second or two. These are great swims due to the environment change and physical change from their championship meet in November. However, some will still come back devastated that they did not repeat or get faster.

Sickness / Injury / Stress

Even though we would like to think that outside forces do not influence us when we are pursuing best times, they often do. Such everyday things like getting sick or just getting past being sick, recovering from an injury, or even dealing with stress from family life or school can get in the way of achieving best times every time you race.

Qualifying Times

Some swimmers invest so much time into qualifying times, to the extreme that some of them will decide their season is a success or failure over hitting or missing that qualifying time, regardless of if the time is their best or if they have progressed in the other areas.

As far as a swimmer or parent is concerned, qualifying times should just be looked at as arbitrary times that have no bearing on the potential of a swimmer. Being 0.01 seconds over a qualifying time does not make your season a failure any more than being under by 0.01 makes your season a success. It's all relative to how much the swimmer improved as an athlete and as a person.

So why is this fascination with time debilitating?

All coaches have had a swimmer come back from a fantastic race and was so focused on time that they could not see the good and bad from that race. They do not realize that this narrow view defeats the whole learning purpose of the race. How were their underwaters, their turns, their breakouts? Did they execute the race strategy? Or did they just notice the time?

Parents have the most potential to derail that learning process. I have experienced a great coach/swimmer post-race analysis get shot out of the water by a parent questioning their swimmer. "What happened?" or "You weren't trying were you?" Also, I have seen parents bribing their kids for best times with money, ensuring that the swimmer will only focus on best times. Now I can understand that the parents do not know the race strategy going in, but they do not need to know it. Their job is to support their swimmer no matter what!

Let us not leave out the coaches' role in all of this, myself included. We will tend to praise a time when the goal of the race was something different. If we tell them the goal of the race is one thing, we should not confuse them by focusing on time afterwards.

So, what do you take away from all of this? Basically, we all need to look beyond the race times and think about what the goal of the race was. Often, during the season it has nothing to do with time.

Little Things cont. from Pg1

If you have ever tried to pass a fellow swimmer, only to have them speed up when you make your attempt, you know how annoying it can be.

Mostly good etiquette is a simple matter of thinking first, things like not jumping into your lane when a swimmer in the pool is doing a flip turn, watching your arms when doing butterfly in your lane so you don't crash arms, and if you need to stop staying out of the way of other swimmers. They are all little things that will help you become a good lane mate and ultimately have a great practice.

The last two things you can do to have a great practice and show your coach you care about your swimming is to not pull on the lane lines and listen up when they are talking. If you remember all these small unspoken rules and your practice will be conflict free.

Practice Sets

What do you think about when swimming? Are you thinking about what your coach just said or does your mind wander to what you're going to eat when you get home? Controlling your thoughts is one of the hardest things to do in a practice.

So, what should you think about?

Try counting, your dolphin kicks off the wall and your strokes to the end of the pool. This will get you into a rhythm and help you in determining your pace. This will also help determine if you are holding onto more water with fewer strokes. The lesson of counting strokes should be one you continue throughout your years of swimming.

Who remembers Florida?

"Staying focused, being alert and thinking will make your practice better and more productive."

You should know how many strokes you take when sprinting vs. swimming a 500 for instance.

Think about your head location. Are you watching the bottom or the wall in front of you? The waterline should be about mid-cap on the top of your head, deep enough that when you rotate to breathe, one goggle is easily submerged. Having your head

too high not only will give you a pain in your neck it will also change your body position creating drag. Just remember drag is bad in swimming!

If you are still having a problem thinking about random things, try singing a song in your head to get you in the mood to swim. Finally, listen to what your coach is telling your teammates. you might gain a little nugget of information that will help you too!

Summary

The practice that you will do in the pool is by far the most important "little thing" you can do to help your swimming.

Think about all the hours you will spend practicing. Don't you want them to count? Staying focused, being alert and thinking will make your practice better and more productive.

The process of learning how to swim a good practice is an ongoing responsibility of each swimmer, no matter the swimmer's level and abilities. Be open and flexible to try new ways to practice and be the best you can be in the sport.

Goal Setting

This still has to be challenging, but cannot be so out of reach that you will be devastated if you don't achieve it. You have to know what you think is attainable but still challenging to push you further with working toward that goal.

T: Time Frame
You have to set a specific time frame in what you want to achieve this goal. This will help motivate you in your training and the opportunities you may have to achieve it. These will not be goals that can be accomplished in 1-2 days or 1-2 weeks. They should be based on 3-4 weeks or 3-4 months from when you originally set them.
Example: I want to drop 2 seconds in the 100-yard butterfly by A/B Finals Meet.

When you think about goals, there are two kinds: Performance goals and process goals. Performance goals are the ones you want to achieve. This can be based on time or qualifying for a specific meet cut. Process goals are the ones that you are able to work on in practice every day. These are the ones that describe how you will achieve these goals, the technical aspect of each practice with strokes, starts, turns or underwaters.

There are so many more areas that can be explored and perfected to make you faster. You have to understand that having a goal is wonderful, but the work you put in daily is what matters as well. In training, you can focus on the number of kicks off each wall, not breathing off your turns, perfecting your stroke count. This is just a snippet of the training you have to do in practice.

There is also the psychological aspect, which includes mental visualization, positive mindset training. How are you preparing for each race? Are you thinking of all the "what ifs" that will help prepare you for when the race comes? In order to achieve the goals you set for each season, you need to keep both the performance and process goals in mind. This will ultimately benefit you in the end because you are focusing on how you will get there and what you actually want to achieve with a plan. Continue to think about your goals, the times you want to achieve and start working toward them.

Activity:

1. Write out all your best times in every event that you can swim for your age group.

2. Identify what your short term goal is for each event. This is what can be achieved by mid-season.

3. Identify what your long term goal is for each event. This is what can be achieved by the end of the season.

4. Reflect on how your previous season went and what can be done differently this season.

5. Answer these questions:

a. What is your big inspiration goal (swimming or not swimming related)?

b. Identify your strengths (technical, physical, mental).

c. Identify your weaknesses (technical, physical, mental).

d. Attempt to write a couple SMART (performance) goals based on what you want to achieve this summer/fall based on the season.

e. Attempt to write some process goals that will help you achieve your performance (SMART) goals.

6. Hold onto these goals, or put them onto a posterboard, somewhere you can see it daily as a reminder to you as far as what you are working for.