

Best Practices In Training And Competition – Sharing and Exchanging Ideas

Many thanks to the coaches who responded and provided information for the clinic – coaches from: Area P, Bethlehem, Bucks, Butler, Chester, Delaware, Philadelphia, Northumberland/Snyder.

A. Favorite drills you use to work on specific problems, or just to have fun.

- Freestyle – arm extension: Use a 1" diameter wooden dowel or pvc pipe about 6 to 8 inches long. Have swimmers hold it in front of them with both hands (arms out straight). Take one stroke at a time, alternating arms, keeping the dowel straight in front of them. This helps to force arm extension, streamline position, strong kick. (Hint: if you use PVC pipe, purchase end caps so that they don't sink)
- Any Stroke - "Silent Swim" or "Splash-less Swim" - it's amazing how much faster they can swim if they're not flailing around. Point out to them that lots of splash means lots of wasted energy.
- Freestyle -- Nose Down – Instead of "Put your face in" tell athlete to point their nose to the bottom of the pool.
- All strokes - have each athlete hold a tennis ball in each hand. It will be tougher for them to swim this way. This shows them how important it is to keep their hand in that flat cup shape.
- Freestyle - Have each swimmer 'push' a small ball (6-9 inch diameter) in front of them. This encourages them to reach & extend their stroke.
- "Chase" – start the slower swimmer first, then have a faster swimmer start and try to catch up and pass the first on. Encourages the first swimmer to keep going until the end, and the second swimmer to come from behind. It really helps to know your swimmers pace for this.
- Short (25 yd), all-out sprints with a lot of rest between are great for working on speed.
- Additionally, athletes can start and then when coach blows a whistle, they have to swim as fast as possible from there to the wall. Encourages finishing fast.

There were several versions of this drill that has athlete swim up lane 1, move to lane 2 and swim the opposite direction, move to lane 3 and swim a lap, etc.

- (a) Weave the pool – define a specific stroke and for each lane. Provide a chart so athletes remember what they are supposed to do.
- (b) Sprint drill – in one direction, the length is slow, in the other, it's as fast as possible.
- (c) Snake Swim – 4 lanes – athletes swim up and down switching lanes, then get out, walk to the first lane, and do it again with a different stroke.
- (c) Snake Swim (competitive) – divide the boys against the girls and have them start on diagonally opposite ends of the pool (if you have an even number of lanes. Note – if you have an odd number of lanes, they start on the same end but different sides.) Teams swim up and down each lane working their way across the pool and have to get out when done. First team with all swimmers through the snake and out of the pool is the "winner".

B. Sample Practice plans – for one practice or a season – how do you develop these for your team?

- Create a season plan document with weekly practices. Include warm ups, endurance drills, learning skills and competition experience (optional) for each practice). Make a book that can be shared with swimmers and parents. See Sample from Butler at the end.

- **Warm-ups** – use a warm up that ties in shoulder rotation, stream line, rotary breathing, and front, back, and breast arms. Also we stretch our feet and practice pointed toes. (Connie / Area P demonstrate)
- **Stroke Night** – Pick one stroke and divide it into 4 or 5 components. (example: arms(pull), kick, breathing, starts/turns, put it all together). Assign one coach working on one component in one lane, but each lane does a different component. After about 5-6 minutes blow a whistle – coaches move to the next lane and work on the same component with that group. (Athletes stay in the same lanes all practice, but will have the chance to work with each coach and each component). Can use the “put it all together” exercise for a recap at the end of practice.
- At the beginning of the season work on stroke review -- freestyle, then backstroke and then breaststroke (or learning breaststroke if they don't do it already). At the beginning of the season we manage to keep everyone focused on swim drills for about an hour and then start games but by the end of the season we practice the full two hours most nights.
- Separate beginner (“rookie”) and advanced groups – either different areas of the pool, or different times. This allows personal focus for beginners – can recruit more volunteers, etc. and appropriate practices for both levels.

C. Competition ideas – things that particularly help athletes at a competition

- Talk to the athletes about their personal goals. I keep track of their times and tell them their personal bests. It takes the focus away from specific awards too.
- Use “**Permission slips**” (sample at end) prior to travel to a competition – the top half of the form tells parents/guardians when and where to meet, what the expected return time is, what to bring, who is in charge (including Head Coach's cell number), and may include directions to the competition on the back if needed. The bottom half of the form is returned to the coach and includes any medications needed during the competition, and the name and cell number of who to contact in case the return time is earlier or later than expected. Sometimes we add information on carpooling. Adult athletes may sign their own form.
- Buy soccer shorts for the females (soccer.epicsports.com) to wear over their swimsuits while they are "on deck" doing exercises or just sitting - really cuts down on the "pilling" of the swimsuits.

D. Games, fun drills, home exercises that change the routine, and still add to improvement

- **Water Polo** – adaptations: (a) play across the pool for a game with fewer players, or is a bit less tiring. (b) use noodles or flotations for weaker swimmers, (c) use a kickboard stuck vertically in a pull buoy as the “goal” – if the kickboard is knocked over, it's a score.
- **Assign Homework/Home Exercises** – examples:
 - Walk an extra flight of stairs each day
 - Help wash the dishes to strengthen your legs while you stand and give parents a break!
 - Ask a family member to walk around the block with you each night – promotes fitness for the family as well.
 - Set a timer and do a dance each night for 3 minutes.
 - Set diet tips/guidelines – example: no soda during swim season and limit junk food.
- Pair up 2 people to a kickboard to do laps. They get to talk & fool around a little bit.
- Create drills related to upcoming holidays – example: at Thanksgiving, have swimmers kick backstroke while hands are at armpits “flapping” their wings and they can “gobble gobble” down the pool for the turkey swim.

- Take the night off – tell athletes “You Be the Coach” – each swimmer takes a turn and names stroke, kick or swim length (25 or 50) and what everyone has to remember when doing it. It’s a good way to see if they have learned what you tell them!
- With the lane lines out, athletes start treading water in the middle of the pool. Coach holds a flag, blows the whistle and points in one direction. Athletes swim in that direction. Coach can whistle and change multiple times. Flag straight up means tread water. Also, when athletes go away from the coach, they need to swim backstroke so they can see the flag. Helps with fast turnaround and stamina.
- We encourage fun with underwater retrieval of rings and sometimes coins. We use noodles or tubes for horse racing and invite parents and friends to join in on the fun at our last practice.

E. Pet Peeves – what you wish you could tell other coaches or competition managers.

- **Event selection** – why is an athlete doing a 200 yd. freestyle and 25 yd. freestyle in the same competition? If the athlete can do a 200 yd event, then the 25 yd. event is not appropriate.
- **Event Selection** – athletes should not be in long events if they are very much slower than the rest of the competition. For example, a swimmer that takes 5 minutes for a 100 yard event, is not appropriate. Should we establish maximum time limits for events?
- **Paperwork** - Please submit your entries for competitions at the due date. Heat sheets take time to develop. Competitions are not easy to arrange.
- **Relays** – Can we substitute alternates for relays at the time of the event without registering ALL possibilities in advance as long as we are consistent with total relay time (or at states, before prelims)?
- **Order of Events** – The order of events should be consistent at all competitions and published beforehand so that coaches can help athletes choose events that are not all back-to-back.
- **Disqualifications** – coaches who consistently put athletes in events when they do not have anything close to legal strokes. If your athlete is getting DQ’d consistently, and you don’t know why, find someone who can help you learn the strokes and correct the problem.
- **Divisioning** - SO swim heats should be set up with no more than a 20% difference (ideally 10-15%) in time between the slowest and fastest person in the heat to provide meaningful competition. Often age groups and sometimes genders need to be combined to provide meaningful competition and avoid single-person divisions.

Do you agree with these? Disagree?

F. Tips -- especially for beginners

- If you have a developmental swimmer who will not sit-jump off the side, put a small plastic foot stool in the shallow end so they are already in the water & can simply step off the stool.
- Try “Simon Says”, or running in the water for warm-ups. Form a circle and do high knee jogging, “soccer” kicks and other aerobic exercises.

G. Problem solving – a problem you had, and how you fixed it.

- Ideas for building swimmers for longer distances:
 - “Broken” 100 or 200 or 400 swims – athletes stop for ONLY a 10 second rest after each 25 (in a 100 yd length) or each 50 (for the other lengths). Use a LONG rest after the completion of the entire 100, 200, 400.

- Select a period of time – 8 minutes, or 10 minutes – and encourage all swimmers to keep going for the entire time. Remind them they don't need to go fast, but to focus on pacing themselves so they can swim the entire time without stopping.
 - As athletes are learning to pace, take splits and show them whether they are fairly consistent or not.
- Sometimes a photo or video of the swimmer in action helps them see what needs to be corrected (doesn't work with all swimmers).
 - Work on backstroke touches since most are afraid they will hit their heads. It is hard to teach them to count from the flags but we encourage them to notice the flags and realize that the wall is going to be there soon.
 - If you can't find a competition to go to, contact a program nearby and invite them to a "scrimmage." Fill all 6 lanes with people doing the 25 back (or whatever) and time them. Don't worry about entry times- just worry about knowing that the person can swim a 25 back (or whatever). No awards, nothing fancy, just time and cheer. It will give you a better time and then you can submit more accurate times for events.
 - Offer encouragement; but, watch out that you aren't stunting development..."good job" and "good try" are two different things - both are encouraging, but saying "good job" when you should have said "good try" when learning a new skill will stunt growth.
 - Remind swimmers to rinse their suits in clear water (encourage them to "shower" with the swimsuit on following practice then take the suit off to soap up.
 - If there are athletes that desire to swim the longer distances (particularly the races over 200 yards), they are going to have to practice outside of the normal practice times (there just isn't enough time or lanes to accommodate long distance swimmers on a once-a-week basis). Our distance swimmers also swim 3 or more times per week at their local Y's "on their own." I do encourage it. In the past, I have met swimmers at the Y to give them additional instructional support - this is something I had worked out with the Y and the swimmer's care-givers (the swimmers were already members of the Y).

Other Ideas and Information

- **Using a practice as a fund raiser (Montgomery Co)** – This was incredibly easy. We handed out an explanation letter and a pledge sheet to each athlete (attached at end) Pledge sheet had to be back in 3 weeks and we did the actual lap swimming during a 1 hour practice session. Volunteers had 3x5 cards to keep count of the laps each athlete swam. People could pledge X\$ per lap or a flat amount (no matter how many laps). We set a goal of \$100 per swimmer. We provided juice boxes & juice cups at the end of that hour as an energizer & reward.

Turns out that our 26 swimmers (competitive & developmental) swam 763 laps in 1 hour & raised just over \$7,400!!!!!! We have the luxury of 4 swim sites in the county & will try to rotate this event once a year so we don't over-tax our site's friends & families. You cannot call a fund raiser a "Swim-A-Thon" - this is a trademarked or patented term that could mean that you have to forward a big % of your fund raising to USAA. Don't do that! Keep ALL your money! Ours was called "Get in the Swim" for Mont Co Special Olympics.

- **Converting yard times to metric times** – using a strict ratio of the difference in distance for shorter events (100's and less):
 - a. convert times to total seconds – minutes x 60 + seconds.
 - b. For Yard time to Metric Time, multiply by the ratio of Meters to Yards (1.) or
For Metric time to yard Time, multiply by the ratio of Yards to Meters (0.)

NOTE: To check your conversion, make sure times for yard events are LESS than meters. (i.e., 50 yards is shorter than 50 meters).

- **www.swimoutlet.com** is the BEST place to buy goggles, suits, lap counters, bags, towels, nose clips, ear plugs, etc. I have ordered from them for years - they are fast (usually receive the order within a week), courteous, and truly pleasurable to work with (You can talk to a team sales person who will help with a big order). Their brand (Sporti) is GREAT - goggles are wonderful, come with multiple nose bridges (for sizing), cheap (sometimes, you can get them for as low as \$3/pair), etc. I have also used the Sporti brand for practice equipment (fins, paddles).
- Consider "prescription" goggles (available from swimoutlet.com) for both nearsighted swimmers (up to a -8.0 diopter) and farsighted swimmers (bifocal type goggles up to a +4.0 diopter) - they are inexpensive (around \$8/pair) and make a world of difference for some swimmers. Note: Healthy Athletes Vision Screening may provide prescription goggles for free.
- Use visuals - posters, flash cards, pictures. When I was teaching "dive from deck" - I emphasized the safety rules; especially, that the water must be at least 6 feet deep. I used flash cards to show "6" and then had other common depth numbers (some less than 6 and some greater than 6) and went over which could be dived into and which couldn't - I also walked all around the pool with the swimmers that wanted to dive and pointed out the different depths and asked them if they could dive in there or not (I broke them into groups of about 6 to do this).

Should we post these on the SOPA web page? Email a tip-a-month? Would you help? submit ideas? Edit or send ideas?

SAMPLE PRACTICE PLAN



Butler County Special Olympics Swimming Practice Notes

BACKSTROKE – INDIVIDUAL INSTRUCTION

- Stretches
- Warm-up
 - 4 mini-laps walking (assign lanes as below)
 - 3 laps freestyle (easy) – end at deep end
- Swim Review – STARTS & BREASTSTROKE (5 or 9 laps, depending on endurance of swimmer – end at shallow end)
- Swim practice – BACKSTROKE
 - Practice floating on back – emphasis is on “relaxed” posture (ears in water, belly and feet close to surface)
 - Backstroke clinic w/COACH – individual instruction
 - 8 laps backstroke, 2 laps freestyle, 2 laps butterfly (if known)
- Cool-down
 - 4 mini-laps walking

Take notes on each swimmer – watch for weak wrists; as arm comes out of water, the shoulder should “lead” the arm; thumb up as hand comes out of water, rotate hand so that little finger enters water first; arm should brush ear; very little body rotation during strokes; counting strokes on approach to wall; turns

Sample letter and form used by Montgomery County for a swimming fund raiser – thanks to coach Jean Christ



Special Olympics
 Pennsylvania
 Montgomery County

Let's Get in the Swim for Special Olympics!

Montgomery County currently provides training for approximately 1,200 active athletes. The cost of running such a successful and extensive program is rising every year. Entry fees to sectional and state competitions can be up to \$30 per athlete. Transportation to these events can range from \$4,000 to \$7,000 for our county's athletes to attend - not to mention the enormous expense of our great summer camp. Our county also pays ever-increasing amounts for the use of many of our training facilities.

I thought we could have a good time and try to contribute towards some of these expenses by having our very 1st swimming fund raiser. Here's how it would work:

1. We'll do the fund raiser during our training session on Tuesday April 19th, 2011.
2. Grab a pledge form - take 2 if you think you need them!
3. Try to get as many people as possible to sponsor you. Fill out the form completely.
4. Sponsors can pledge a fixed amount up front - OR - they can pledge an amount per lap that you will swim in an hour.
5. Sponsors can pay before or after you swim. (Try to encourage payment in advance so you don't have to bother your sponsors twice.)
6. **MAKE SURE YOU THANK YOUR SPONSORS!**
7. Checks can be made payable to "SOMAC" or "Special Olympics Montgomery County" and are tax deductible - Tax ID #23-2078543. If your sponsors would like, they can mail payment directly to Special Olympics Montgomery County at 630 West Germantown Pike, Suite 161, Pymouth Meeting, PA 19452.
8. Bring the completed pledge forms to practice no later than Tuesday April 19th, 2011. All pledges should be collected and brought to practice by Tuesday April 26th, 2011.
9. We'll have an official "lap counter" for each swimmer. We'll also have juice and mult cups to keep your energy level up!
10. Let's set a goal to have every swimmer raise \$100.00 or more!



Let's Get in the Swim for Special Olympics!
 Tuesday, April 19, 2011
 7:30 - 8:30 PM

Swimmer's Name: _____ Pledge #: _____

I plan to swim at least _____ laps for Special Olympics.

Dear Potential Sponsor,
 I am participating in the Special Olympics fundraiser. All proceeds will help fund the Montgomery County Special Olympics organization. You can sponsor me for a flat rate amount or an amount per lap and can name a maximum amount that you are willing to contribute. You can pay at time of sponsorship or after the fundraiser date. I will return to you how many laps I swim and collect your contribution at that time. Make checks payable to "SOMAC" or "Special Olympics Montgomery County". All contributions are tax-deductible. Tax ID #23-2078543. If you would prefer, you can mail your payment directly to Special Olympics Montgomery County at 630 West Germantown Pike, Suite 161, Pymouth Meeting, PA 19452.

Thank you!

Swimmer's Name	Number of Sponsors	Pledge per Lap (Example: \$1.00)	Maximum Pledge	Total Pledge Amount	Total Pledged Amount
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					

Questions?
 Jean Christ: christjean@mcet.com or 215-672-1367

Lap Counter Names: _____
 Total Laps: _____
 Total Collected: _____