

SWIMMING WORLD / SWIMMING TECHNIQUE  
speculation

1352 # of words

Swimmers run

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A

Run? "No thanks, coach. I like the water. It protects me when I trip."

A socialized water wizard thrives on chlorine stench, broad shoulders and the arrival of the latest time standard. These youngsters seem bred for the water with gills, fins and bleach-blond hair. Their minds are filled with gold medal swimming attitudes which compel swimmers into believing the best and only way to supplement a swim program is with more swimming -- not running.

With propellers instead of feet, it is understandable why these athletes prefer floating and shun running. A swimmer's motivation for running is low.

I believe the "typical swimmer attitude" must be changed before a productive running program emerges. Most coaches fail to change this negative attitude swimmers hold toward running. Coaches do not give enough attention to the swimmers' minds

which drive the bodies. The evidence is the large number of coaches who once started running their swimmers, but dropped the idea because running did not come as naturally as swimming. Of course it won't!

I wanted my swimming team to run. I was convinced of the merits, but I knew my swimmers would not be as agreeable. Before my team took its first step, I conjured, calculated and planned to dodge all the pitfalls. I prepared and wanted to make running attractive for the swimmers.

As the season started, I felt it would be important to capture the hesitant minds in the first two weeks. I talked to the team at great lengths. Each day became an educational lesson in running. My crash course was spiced with teaching aids (magazine articles, photos, names, dates, examples, questions) and hints for the most effective team approach.

I educated my fleet of cruisers on posture, footwork, sneakers, clothing, events, races, local runners, ultra-distance running, cross-country running, the pentathlon, the tri-athlon, leg muscles, injuries and the aerobic and anerobic processes. They understood, and I did not mind losing workout time for detailed explanations. The swimmers became intrinsically motivated and accepted a running workload -- just as they already accepted a swimming workload.

(M.D.C.)

After the swimmers' minds are on the right track, the coach's next obstacle becomes the practices. Water work is easy to write and administer. Running is different. Most swimming coaches are not track experts.

My team's opening runs were around the Ohio University Convocation Center. The Convo, a big round building, acted as an ego saver. Due to the curved shape, everybody was out of sight of each other. Everybody kept to their own pace, and peer group interruption was minimized.

Another saving grace was the swimmers' practice schedule for the first two weeks. I did not combine running and swimming on the same day. It is not fair to have out of conditioned athletes doing two strenuous activities back to back. However, this was temporary. By the third week, the team mixed the two activities in one practice.

The all running practices of the early season lasted 70 minutes. Each session started and finished with mid-body, endurance and flexibility exercises. The running lasted 25 minutes.

In the season's first two months, April and May, the team ran four times a week. In June, the team ran two times a week. Running did get interrupted for the ten days of

"goon week," the most demanding swimming days. In July, the team ran only once a week.

In the sixth week of the season, the swimmers were getting in the running groove, and the improvements were blatant. The team felt good about running, and the run-swim combination practices were the most enjoyable.

Variety retained good spirits among the swimmers. I was glad we didn't run the same route over and over. Without causing confusion, I felt change was important. We ran a course about five times, then we deviated and broke-in a new path.

Regardless of the detours, I tried to have everyone finish at approximately the same time. To compensate for faster and slower runners, some people went different distances. For example, the fastest might run around the block 4 times. The majority of the team would run around the block 3 times. Then the slowest and walking wounded would do the course twice. This way a group entered the pool, and swimming time started with the entire team present.

I made sure not to cheat anyone out of swimming time, but at the same time a few athletes hedged and cheated themselves. All the swimmers were not running 100%. To

push for additional effort, I unveiled the "Aerobic Run." Besides being a long term motivator, the "Aerobic Runs" were a tool for measuring running conditioning.

"Aerobic Runs" were simple to conduct. Everyone ran around the football track in the same direction for 15 minutes. The goals were to cover as many laps as possible. Each athlete counted their own laps, and as time expired I screamed, "Stop!" We recorded the results on note cards.

These results of the first two scores, baseline runs, helped establish the team goals which appeared at the top of the contingency contract.

The contract's five point award system was complicated, but worth the trouble. Some of the points needed clarified.

In item 1, the team's running total was the sum of all the laps by all the runners present on that given day. Playing a Frisbee field game was to be the reward. The team never made the total I set for them, but we did play Frisbee golf once in July. A long course was designed, and we kept score by time instead of strokes.

In item 2, "de-feet" was actually a poster shaped like a pair of feet. The feet were filled with lines. I inserted a swimmer's name in a space when that swimmer surpassed his or her best running total. For each improvement, the swimmer received instant public recognition.

The "de-feet" poster was hung at the pool. The poster did not have the number of laps indicated for any runner. It showed improvement only, and as the "de-feet" became full, the team received T-shirts. It would have taken 90 improvements to remove "de-feet" from our walls!

In item 3, I gave every runner a number to shoot for. I hoped every swimmer would be able to equal the 8.25 lap expectancy.

For items 4 and 5, I felt I needed some extreme goals which were aimed at the athletes with the widest range of ability levels. The bottom runners were hard to get going. And on the other side, the fastest runners were doing well, but they did not attack the runs as they should. Goals 4 and 5 stopped these problems.

Items 4 and 5 pushed the fastest and the slowest runners, and curbed regression toward the mean. On the baseline "Aerobic Runs," one boy hit a high of  $9\frac{1}{2}$  laps -- once. After him, the next highest scorer was more than a lap behind. With this in mind, I felt the 45 laps would be unattainable for my group of runners. However on the first run under contract, five swimmers exploded. Each ran more than 10 laps and the total for the top five runners was 52 laps. I could not believe it.

11/20/88

The pizza party came later in the month -- two days before our first swimming meet. I used the time in the pizza parlor to review team rules for swim-meet behavior. The parents loved the meal, but told me not to hold a pizza dinner every week.

I do not blame the parents. A pizza party every week would be quite boring. But I know of a few other things that could be worse.

How about being on a swim team for ten years and doing nothing but going up and down swimming pools, eating bubbles -- instead of pizzas?

My final word of warning is for the coaches who might like to copy this program. Feel free to do so, but understand the consequences. You might have swimmers drop out of your program.

I did. As it turned out, running became so attractive I lost swimmers. Encouraged, some quit my team and went on to pursue their running careers.

Coaches, take your team outside and run by something green -- instead of algae on the pool deck.

side bar

A) the stipulations for "Aerobic Run" rewards:

1. If the team's running total is 270 laps or more in one "Aerobic Run," then on the next scheduled running day the team will play Frisbee as part of a field game instead of running.
2. If anyone improves by  $\frac{1}{4}$  lap or more, their name gets added to "de-feet" for public recognition.
3. If the team average hits 8.25 laps, then the team will receive new swimming caps.

extreme rules:

4. If the sum of the top 5 runners is 45 laps or more, then the team will celebrate with a pizza party. To get a pizza party the next time, add 5 more laps to the total.
5. If the sum of the lowest 5 scores is 32 laps or more, then the team will play 30 minutes of Gator at the next swim practice.

B) The coach agrees to help all the athletes with their swimming and running tasks, administer a proper program, plan practices and award privileges according to the listings above.

coach: \_\_\_\_\_

C) The swimmers of the Athens Swim Club will run hard to improve their conditioning, excel to improve their strength and practice to improve their flexibility. The team members will also try to exhibit good form and the proper technique in everything they do.

athlete: \_\_\_\_\_



(Side-bar)

# Athens Otters Running Results

laps run in  
15 minutes

letters = Athletes

	Baseline #1	Baseline #2	*** Intervention
10½			J M A F L Q
10			
9½	J	J	U K
9			
8½	U	R	
8	L	F K O U	V T I R
7½	T	I P V	
7	V I	Q M	G B
6½	M	B	
6			C H
5½	O S	H	D, E, S O, P*
5			
not running, hurt for the day	B, G	A, L, S	O, P

\* O + P ran anyways,  
they were hurt that day.