

OPEN WATER SEASON IS SOOOO CLOSE!!

Last summer, with limited pool and lane space, a host of swimmers flocked to nearby lakes for open water swimming and a chance to stay wet. Many for the first time. I suspect this summer will be the same. Now is the perfect time to get ready for the open water season.

Molly Hoover recently wrote an article for USMS that has some interesting open water training ideas. It's worth a read.

<https://www.usms.org/fitness-and-training/articles-and-videos/articles/pool-sets-adapted-for-open-water>

Last year, Elaine Howley wrote an article for USMS covering things to be concerned about with open water swimming during the Covid era, along with certain safety concerns to be mindful about. Another good read.

<https://www.usms.org/fitness-and-training/articles-and-videos/articles/what-to-know-about-early-season-open-water-swimming>

We can certainly use the lakes to continue our interval training and conditioning. It's a great way to keep in shape. BUT, open water swimming is also a way to feel relaxed and let the clutter drift from our minds. Long, relaxed swims, feeling the sensation of our body interacting with the water, with no pace clock, timeframes, or deadlines limiting us, is a way to paint a smile on our faces for the rest of the day—it's the real Zen of swimming. Get out there and enjoy!

LET'S USE THE POOL TO GET READY

Drafting Set

I've mentioned this before, but drafting while swimming is a kick! If you've watched the Tour de France or other bike races, you've noticed that there was a large Peloton containing most of the racers throughout the race. The lead bikers peddled at 90 to 100 rpms while those on the back were barely peddling. It's no different when swimmers draft.

In the pool, put 3, 4, or 5 swimmers with similar capabilities in one lane. At the send-off each swimmer leaves *immediately* (no 5 second rule) after the swimmer in front of him/her and swims as close to their feet as possible. At the end of 100 yds, the lead swimmer, #1, stops in the far right corner of the lane and swimmer #2 takes the lead. Swimmer #1 joins at the end of the pack. This continues with each swimmer taking a turn as the lead swimmer. Set a distance so that each swimmer swims a minimum of 2 times for each position—5 swimmers @100 yards twice through = 1,000 yards. It's great fun in the open water.

CAVEAT –It is not the goal of the lead swimmer to take off and try to lose the pack. The lead swimmer should maintain a pace that will challenge the pack, yet keep it in a tightly knit group.

Sighting Set

Without black lines and lane lines, sighting becomes an important element of open water swimming. Done correctly, you won't break your stride or "kink" your neck.

If you've watched Michael Phelps swim butterfly—who hasn't!!—you've noticed his chin lifts and juts forward, just clearing the surface of the water. That's what we want to strive for when sighting in our open water swims. Lifting the head and shoulders out of the water to see where we're going will take its toll on our neck and back muscles during the course of the swim.

You can practice this at any time in the pool during any workout. During a set of 100s, for example, try sighting once or twice per length during every other 100. If you're a swimmer who keeps track of all of your times, see how your sighting times compare with your straight swims. If there's less than a 5 second difference you've mastered the art of sighting.

Close Your Eyes and Swim a Straight Line

This is so important especially for anyone who participates in open water sanctioned events. You need to learn how to swim as the crow flies—in a straight line. If you've ever seen a Strava printout of someone's open water swim you know what I mean. The red line looks like it was drawn by a drunken sailor.

If you have a lane to yourself, perfect, but if not, you and your lane mates can swim 25s waiting until each swimmer has finished before repeating. Push off over the black line and close your eyes. Swim 4 strokes less than your normal stroke count per 25 then stop to see where you are. If you're still over the black line, GREAT. If you've already bumped a lane line or two or are off center at the end, then you've got some fixin to do.

Swimming crooked is usually the result of not having your two arms moving symmetrically. By that I mean each hand should enter in front of your shoulder. The hand and forearm should anchor and pull straight back and exit past your hip. If one hand is pulling past the center point of your torso and the other is pulling beyond the side of your body, you *will* swim crooked.

This can take some time to fix, but it's worth it. Since you're doing 25s take as few breaths as possible, open your eyes and watch each stroke to see if you can achieve symmetry. Once you have that down, close your eyes and start breathing every stroke. Got it? Hopefully, but if not, I'll bet you're dropping your shoulder way too much when you breathe causing your non-breathing-side arm to cross the center point of your torso.

Just a Fun Set To Try

When elite swimmers are interviewed after an amazing swim, they always, without fail, point out something they didn't do right and need to work on. Caleb Dressel after breaking

Michael Phelps' 100 meter fly world record, focused on how he was too deep off the wall at the turn. Lily King after just missing breaking her own world record in the 100 meter breaststroke knew that during the final 20 meters of her swim she wasn't hunching her shoulders enough during the arm recovery. She knew she had to fix that.

All of us mere mortals can surely find one part of our stroke that we need to work on. Pick that one thing and give this a try:

Swim a 300 or 400 at a moderate pace. During that entire swim, think of nothing except that one thing. Stay focused. Remember, if we repeat it over and over it will become part of our muscle memory.

Later on during practice include this set:

3 x (3x100)

This is 3 sets of 3 100s but it's a continuous swim with a descending interval. Decide how fast you think you can hold 3 x100s at with 5 or less seconds rest. That will be the interval for you 3rd set. Your 1st set will be 10 seconds more than your 3rd and your 2nd set will be 5 seconds more than your 3rd set.

Example:

3 x 100 on an interval of 1:50

3 x 100 on an interval of 1:45

3 x 100 on an interval of 1:40

During this set stay focused on that one thing. When you start to get tired is when your stroke may fall apart a bit—stay focused on that one thing!

Last Thing

I've only been in Montana for four years and I've barely scratched the surface of places to see in our State. To those coaches or lanes mates without coaches, I'm more than willing to travel to *any* parts of our State to put on a stroke clinic. Please reach out to me and we can design the type of clinic to best meet your specific needs. We can use a local pool or any lake—your choice and I wouldn't dream of charging a cent.

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