

PERFECT STROKE, THE RESULT OF PERFECT PRACTICE

by Dick Hannula

When my previous articles of the 2008-09 school year are assembled, you have a catalog of swimming drills for all four competitive swimming strokes. The catalog of drills should be a starting point for each coach. You can add and even delete drills as they come to your attention. My catalog included stroke technique application to correct common stroking errors.

At the ASCA World Swim Coaches' Clinic, Mark Schubert, USA Swimming Head Coach, stated that the difference now in world swimming success is in the improvement in stroke technique worldwide. Assuming that the new technological advancements in competitive swim suits eventually results in a level playing field again, the statement is totally correct. I've seen the improved technique worldwide myself, especially from the 60's to the present. I have always believed that the best technique combined with proper training produces the best results.

My first high school swim team had only one swimmer who was on the local YMCA swim team for a short period of time. The local Y was a few blocks from our rival high school and was the feeder program for that team. My recruits were out of my home room, and business classes that I was teaching at that time. I had to emphasize teaching, and teaching good technique in my program. That team and teaching program produced a significant number of state champions within two years.

You have my catalog of drills. The goal of this article is to better enable each coach to use drills more effectively in their teaching and training.

Drills are a most effective method to train technique. Emphasize how a drill should be done to attain the best desired technique. Explain, demonstrate, and practice the drill to attain perfection. The coach and swimmer must know the purpose or intention of a particular drill. **Purpose** must be instilled if a drill is to succeed. Teach a drill correctly and then practice the drill @ 100% correct.

The coach must remain active during drill work. This isn't the time for a coffee break. Observe and supervise the drill work during training. The swimmer must feel that the coach is actively watching the swimmer, evaluating, and correcting stroke technique. Observe from different positions – front, side, back, overhead, bleachers, underwater, and looking at the swimmer leaning forward and looking from behind and under your armpit at the swimmer. Every one of these positions can give the coach another perspective as to the efficiency of the stroke.

Emphasize the positive. Tell the swimmer what he or she is doing right. Minimize or eliminate telling what is wrong. Swimmers must visualize correct technique to move toward perfect technique. The coach must devise new drills or use the best drill available to correct bad stroking habits. A drill done correctly can correct bad habits by "forcing" a new stroking pattern. Each swimmer is unique and may need a different approach. Recognize what is broken and needs fixing. Some drills are good to be used for everyone on the team. They remind swimmers of the best technique and help to keep all swimmers aware of the importance of doing the drill and then the stroke correctly. When a stroke needs correction – be relentless in your teaching.

Persevere in your stroke drills. **TEACH, TEACH, TEACH!**

Which drills do I recommend? This depends on you as the coach and the needs of your swimmers. The purpose of this article is to challenge you to use your drills effectively and to create new drills as needed. You already have my basic catalog of drills. Most of those I would seldom use. My own experience was to make the catalog of drills and then add to the list with invited input from other coaches.

Streamlining is one skill that needs constant reminders given to team members. Every swimmer needs to continue to improve their streamlining skills off of each wall. This is still one of the most neglected skills and one of the most available areas to improve swimming times on too many teams. This is fundamental and needs to be established early in each season and then continually emphasized through the season. Teach on deck streamlining and have the swimmers teach it to each other. Do cross pool torpedo streamlining without the kick and then add the underwater dolphin kick.

Han's Paddles improve swim drills. Actually paddles improve swim drills. The Han's variety is what I use for most drills. They are the right size and have adequate holes to feel water on the hand. My drill list always includes the use of paddles for all or most all of the drills. The use of paddles in drill swimming enhances learning when the paddle is adequately holed and somewhat flexible. The feel of the water and the distance per stroke are significantly increased. Sculling drills should always include paddle use. I use my Gripper paddle for sculling and for a limited number of my drills. The size of the paddle should be appropriate to the drill and the physical maturity of the user. I like the Gripper which is a larger paddle than the Han's for a

breaststroke drill. The pulling drill wearing swim fins or mono fins with the butterfly kick should be done with the Gripper for most high school swimmers on up. This is an essential drill to build the power of the insweep and the lunge forward. Another drill where I use the Gripper is in the backstroke. The touch and go drill in my catalog of drills is best used with Grippers for mature high school swimmers.

Your job as the coach when using drills is to make the drills do their job. Make your drill training effective.

1. Teach each drill individually first and teach it correctly and expect 100% correct practice.
2. Combine drills whenever feasible.
3. Intersperse a drill to create a focus point when building into a training set.
4. Switch from drill to full stroke going into the walls on turns to emphasize fast, efficient turns.
5. Continue to affirm the strong points of a swimmer's stroke even when working on a correcting drill.
6. Ask the swimmer to review and use a particular drill when the need arises.
7. Pay attention to the swimmer during drill training. Observe and evaluate.
8. Care! The coach that cares for the swimmer has the best chance that the swimmer will care as well. That swimmer has the best chance to succeed from his or her application of drill training. This is a follow up of the preceding number 7.