

Dryland Strength Training for Master's Swimmers

David Williamson

Head Swim Coach

James J. Harris YMCA, Charlotte, NC

During the course of our weekend at USMS SwimFest this past June, we were reminded that in the sport of swimming, the training that we do out of the pool is equally as important as the training that takes place in the pool. As many of us are aware, simple pool training does not always provide the strength training we need as athletes and in many cases, does not burn as many calories as we would hope due to the limited time that most Masters are able to spend in the pool. It is therefore important for all swimmers to complement their pool time with time spent developing their strength out of the water.

Our instructor for the dryland seminar was Stacy Peterson, an associate strength coach for multiple sports at the University of California San Diego and a trainer with Acceleration Sports. Based on her abilities and knowledge, I do not believe that I would have challenged her to a push up competition when I was in my prime. Many of the exercises she showed us ranged from very basic to advanced, and all could be performed using a minimum amount of equipment. It is important to note that Stacy stressed the importance of proper technique over the number of repetitions or sets that one performs of an exercise. This greatly reduces the risk of injury and increases your success rate for improvement. And naturally, stretching prior to exercise is of the utmost importance.

Stacy's lecture and demonstrations could be broken down into four areas: core, lower body strength, upper body pushing and upper body pulling. Her recommendation for core training was blunt and to the point: **swimmers need to complete upwards of 200 abdominal exercises per day, six days per week.** Some of her suggestions include planks at 45-90 second intervals; side planks at 30 second intervals; and crunches and reverse crunches in sets of 20 to 30. Other suggestions included toe touches, supermans (where you lay on the ground and lift your arms, legs and head as though you are flying like superman) and windshield wipers (where you cross your legs, lift them to a near 90° angle, press up and tilt your legs from left to right).

Lower body strength exercises that were suggested by Stacy were basically the old standard favorites that included lunges, squats and step ups. Two types of lunges were demonstrated, first the standard forward stepping lunge as well as a rear stepping lunge. For our squat exercises, Stacy had us simply using a light barbell to hold across our shoulders. Another variation that was demonstrated was the Bulgarian Split Squat, which involved laying one foot behind you on a bench and squatting with the focus being only one leg.

The final categories that Stacy focused on were upper body pushing and pulling. For upper body pushing, push ups were her main focus (and again, correct technique is an important key to this) and her suggestion is to perform multiple sets with a reasonable amount of repetitions (i.e. three sets of ten). Her demonstration included the standard push ups we have all been performing for years (traditional and elevated), but in one of

the finer twists of the morning, she offered two variations of push ups using a medicine ball. The first was not very difficult, involving an elevated push up with both feet planted on a medicine ball. The second variation required great strength and coordination (and as we all know, most of us started swimming in the first place due to a lack of coordination). The exercise is performed as a normal push up, except one hand is positioned on a medicine ball and one hand on the ground. A push up is performed in this position. However, once you return to the up position, the grounded hand moves to the ball and once in place, the opposite hand moves to the ground for the next push up. Upper body pulling exercises consisted of the traditional lat pull downs and dumbbell and cable rows.

One of the greatest things that I took away from Stacy Peterson's lecture and demonstrations was the simplicity of the exercises that she suggested. Many were basic exercises that we learned through the years in physical education. I believe one of the keys to success that she provided is the idea performing most of these exercises in multiple sets of repetitions. I agree with this as I think we would all benefit more by breaking down a set of push ups into 3 sets of 10 or 15 at a time as opposed to trying to knock out 50 push ups in one setting. Then again, I am just trying to get in my 200 sit ups a day at this point.