

SwimFest '10
University of California at San Diego
June 4-6, 2010

Friday evening began with a coaches-only panel discussion with esteemed coaches providing perspectives on their clubs, their coaching philosophies and animated Q&A peppered throughout the two hours.

We learned about the similar challenges clubs and coaches have when collecting dues, keeping track of members and negotiating pool times and rental fees. The more positive similarities included the fun exchanges we have with our diverse and dedicated bunch of athletes and the great relationships we share with so many fine folks in our community.

The list of participating panelists included:

Gary Hall, Sr.
Frank Marcinkowski
Ron Marcikic
Laureen Welting
Kerry O'Brien
Mickey Murad
Matt Macedo

Discussions ranged from Kerry's wildly successful Walnut Creek Masters group losing city funding and having three coaching salaries and his benefits up in the air, to the craziness Ron/Sickie tries to include each day while coaching at UCSD and keeping the masters attention focused on technique and fitness.

Mickey and Matt discussed the open-water craze that they've tapped into with their new business model, offering clinics geared towards this more wild event and how it's not just the triathlete that wants this info.

Frank was excited about the Club Assistant web hosting that has allowed him to focus on the athletes, and not the administration aspect of building his club, which three years ago was stalled at 30+ members, but has grown to well over 250 swimmers now.

3-time Olympian Gary Hall had a very different message this evening, a serious push for former Olympians rallying together to combat obesity (WorldFit.org), as well as expressing the gratitude to still be involved with a sport he loves dearly and has meant so much to his family.

Saturday morning began with a check in and warm poolside welcome from Mel Goldstein, organizer of the event, and the CEO of USMS, Rob Butcher. Coaches and attending swimmers had been divided into sub-groups for the morning's activities. Moving around in one hour sections, we had 3 sessions prior to lunch:

1. Frank Marcinkowski and his assistants demonstrated a complete dryland session with many simple exercises that have been in use for years, with slightly tweaked movements involving medicine balls and standard PVC pipe.
2. Gary Hall, Sr. lectured on the three fundamentals of fast swimming. This talk, although interesting, was truly geared towards one event, the 50 Free, and no other. Focus was on hand and elbow position, head posture, hip rotation and kick.

3. Kerry O'Brien discussed and demoed the use of the Tempo Trainer, a product by Finis that helps with regulating the cadence of a stroke. There are basic guidelines to understand when using this product, such as what value works best for smooth, easy and efficient swimming, but trial and error seem to be the guiding force behind how best to understand, establish and/or increase the tempo/pace of your stroke.

While having lunch poolside we listening to and viewed video from Genadijus Sokolovas, Ph.D., on "Swimming Power." Dr. Sokolovas has worked for three decades on the physics of swimming, videotaping elite swimmers at every Olympics for the past 20+ years. Video analysis of all four strokes and their power output during all phases of the stroke is his specialty.

Any time I can attend an event like this and walk away with one solid bit of info that is new, makes more sense or is an epiphany to how I coach, train and understand this awesome sport, I consider it worthwhile. My "walk-away kernel" came during this lecture. I now have a much better way to describe WHY we are so much more powerful swimming backstroke when we have great hip and shoulder rotation, and that is because when we rotate fully so that our front is facing the sidewall, our pull is happening in front of the plane of our body. If we remain flat on our back with little to no hip rotation, then our pull phase happens either equal to the plane of our body, or worse, behind the plane of our body. These last two options are much weaker alternatives to having great hip rotation and having our pull take place in front of our body's plane. We have much greater strength and leverage with our stroke when it happens in front of our body.

After lunch, all participating swimmers were in the water, and we had a different coach offer stroke drills for each of the four strokes. 2-3 coaches were at the end of each lane-at both ends, and 14 lanes were in use. Swimmers would hear a drill, then attempt a length. Coaches at the far end would offer feedback and swimmers would make subtle corrections.

In my opinion, this drill time would be greatly enhanced by having an elite swimmer demonstrate each drill during it's description, as many swimmers are visual learners. This was great fun, and the swimmers seemed to truly enjoy the attention and hearing quite a few different drills and getting feedback from a variety of coaches.

Sunday morning began at the "other" UCSD pool, a newer (less than 10 years old) 50m pool that has stadium seating and is used for both USCD's college and masters swimming teams, and UCSD's successful water polo program. The pool had all lanelines removed and three open water buoys formed a triangle in the large open space.

We re-divided into our previous day's groups and again had three sessions:

1. Key Concepts in Open Water Swimming - Matt Macedo
2. Strategic Open Water Racing - Mickey Murad Both these former NCAA All-America swimmers have formed a company, FirstWave, www.firstwaveswim.com and they conveyed valuable information that, although not new to a swimmer with a handful of races under their belt, is essential to the newcomer to the sport. Important keys on how best to draft, round buoys, sight-breathe, enter and exit the water (beach & surf vs. floating start), use of landmarks as gauges to course, to eating options before racing. If you've done more than a few open water races, all these points clearly resonated as essential to having a great game plan, and having them affirmed by a community of folks that are teaching neophytes was reassuring.
3. 3. Open water video and discussion, this took place while viewing and dissecting the USA Swimming National 10k Pan-Pac Trials that took place in Long Beach, CA, the previous day. This was a fantastic perspective on world-class endurance swimmers and the strategies they employed while gauging their rivals. The tempo, although considered comfortably aerobic for these elite athletes, was brisk from the start. The stealth measures the swimmers took to take on fuel during the race, in concert with their coaches, was also masterful. And, to watch the

incredible tempo be maintained for 9000 meters, then to have a whole new level of racing unfold with 1000m remaining was not only astonishing to witness, but a true testament to the fitness levels of these athletes. Both the men's and women's races had a 4-6 athlete field literally sprinting for the finish the final 800-1000 meters, as if they were racing a 200-yard free.

After lunch, we made our way down to beautiful LaJolla Shores, where we assembled our group on the beach and prepared for the "Ocean Session," where we got a bit of info on:

1. Basic ocean awareness at waters edge. We noticing the swell frequency, noted the rip tide and discussed avoiding the rush at a race's start.
2. Fundamentals of Entries and Exits in the surf zone. This included duck-diving (timing your dive into the face of a wave to avoid being slammed/rolled, dolphin diving (using shallow water to perform an extremely rhythmic dolphin motion by diving over the water, going to bottom, immediately pushing off bottom, repeating), using/avoiding rip currents (if a rip current is headed out in the direction of your swim course this could be utilized to your advantage...if a rip current would take you off course, this should be avoided!), and body surfing (using the waves to get you into shore more quickly at the end of a swim).
3. Actual open water swim utilizing the above points. Swimmers took several practice runs and incorporated most of the above points in a very active wave environment. Swimmers also choose to swim straight out to Matt Macedo, where he'd swum by demonstrating efficient beach entry and wave navigation. Matt became the "swim to" point for one of two groups. The second group swam first to Matt, then turned and went north along the shore (staying roughly 300 meters out) to the LaJolla Shores buoy about a 1/2 mile further along the shore, then turning and heading back in for a distance of roughly 1500 meters.

Everyone that wanted to practice these open water drills, in this mecca of open water racing (google LaJolla RoughWater Swim), had the opportunity to do so, and the beach session ended with a short wetsuit demo by Xterra Wetsuits, www.xterrawetsuits.com, maker of fine open water racing suits.

Overall, a very fun weekend full of fit people discussing swimming ideas, strategies, coaching and club challenges and highlights... all there to exchange ideas, give something back to our great sport and hopefully walk away with some new information, a few new contacts and a bit of inspiration.

Thanks to the North Carolina LMSC for providing the resources and backing for us four coaches to get to know one another and to participate in this inspiring event.

Respectfully submitted, September 26, 2010,

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