

High Level Swimming and Vacation/Time Off **Bob Gillett, Swimming Coach**

Once you begin a high level training program in an endurance type sport, it becomes essential to maintain consistency in your workout schedule. Our swimming program requires consistent training sessions in order to continue the developmental progression or even to maintain an achieved level of development. This can really cause a problem for athletes and their family in planning vacations or time off from training. Therefore, I would like to give you a plan that was developed years ago and it has served a few generations of swimmers with valuable structure to have time off from intense training and still maintain their strength and endurance at an acceptable level.

My plan allows approximately a month of time off each year, away from intense training. **After your peak meet at the end of the Long Course Season in August, you start a month of “maintenance workouts” during your vacation time. Senior swimmers do a workout three times per week, equally spaced if possible, for just one hour per day.** The goal is to go about 3000 meters during each session and then leave the pool. Three, one hour workouts per week is enough to maintain your conditioning at an appropriate level during your time off. So our swimmers go from 20-24 hours per week, down to just three hours. When you come into the workout, you must tell the coach that you are there for a “maintenance workout.” Since a number of individualized schedules will be going on, it is important for you to tell the coach when you are starting the maintenance workouts, and you should know the exact date when they end if you are asked by your coach. If you are out-of-town, find a pool and do it on your own!

If you have taken “un-scheduled” time off during the year (illness, injury, family reasons), you should subtract that time off from the four weeks. This will put everyone back into full school year workouts sometime between Labor Day and September 15th each year.

The difference between this system and the “total time off—vacation” system that most swim clubs do in August is remarkable. You need to know what happens to your physical conditioning level once you stop training completely. We actually call it “DE-TRAINING.” De-training actually starts to occur within 48 hours after you stop your workouts. After one month this can result in a very significant decrease in strength and endurance. For example, the functional capillary beds in the local muscle tissue begin to decrease. The cross sectional diameters of the muscle fibers begin to decrease resulting in decreased strength levels. After a month of de-training, in addition to the peripheral system, the central system takes a hit with decreased cardiac output resulting from lower heart stroke volume. Neuro-muscularly, a decrease in the ability to recruit muscle fibers for specific force movements occurs. There are a host of really good reasons not to de-train.

When a senior swimmers experiences de-training, it takes about six weeks of consist work to get back to the previous level. By that time, you are behind for the next season! So, why put up with it, when you can put out just a little effort and start your next season in a good situation, ready to improve and really have a great season of progress! You will not make big improvements with maintenance workouts; however, you will be way ahead during your next season. In addition, you will be able to see your friends and coaches in swimming and stay connected during your break!

