



March 19, 2020

Hi Everybody,

So, we're into our fourth full day of the Coronavirus break. And it sure seems as though the estimates on how long this will last are changing by the hour. When we first heard the schools were closing for two weeks, that seemed like a long time; right now, just a month-long closure would feel like *good* news.

I wanted to share a few observations with you about this crisis, and some of the things that you might be wondering about.

What I don't recommend is coming down with a bad case of "Coronavirus Anxiety" (my phrase, guys) --- that is, watching news coverage 24/7 and living and breathing every development, right up to the moment. For me, at least, this is reminiscent of hurricane coverage when we're in lockdown mode as a state. As Floridians, we know how this goes: We have The Weather Channel on TV in the background, bombarding us with visuals of people boarding their houses, long lines at the gas station, empty water shelves at the store, and a constant satellite image of the storm inching closer to us. After awhile, it's pretty clear that we've done everything that we can do, and we just have to ride it out and hope for the best. This has that same kind of feel, at least to me.

Stay home. Wash your hands. Stay away from other people. And hope for the best. There's really nothing else you can do. Watching round-the-clock coverage, at least for me, does little to change the situation, other than making me feel bad.

As swimmers and coaches, we are tempted to try and make the best of a bad situation by finding ways to stay in shape during an interruption in training. Will it be two weeks? A month? Two months? Longer?? We just don't know, and that is a big problem.

At Seminole Aquatics, we're trying to avoid speculation without information. There are tons of rumors swirling right now, from end-of-year school closures to the possible postponement of the Olympics. Here's what we know for sure, as of today:

Nobody really knows. That's it.

So, we take this day-by-day, and my advice to my athletes is to not let the unknown overwhelm you. Again, stay home. Wash your hands. Hope for the best that the virus recedes quickly, and without a large loss of life.

As for swimming, I have some bad news and good news for you. First, the bad news:

There is really nothing that you can do out of the water that can fully replace in water training with a professional coach. You can run six miles every day, do 100 pull-ups, 100 sit-ups, and 100 pushups, and work out for an hour indoors with a personal trainer. And if you're out of the water for a month, when you get back in the water to train . . .

You're still going to feel like garbage. And that's being generous.

Now, your running will really improve, though. The problem is . . . um, well . . . you're not a runner. You're a swimmer.

I got my Masters degree in Exercise Physiology at UCF. I was a 24 year old triathlete with a college swimming background at the time, and I was fascinated with the possible effect that running and cycling could have as a supplemental form of training for swimmers; in other words, could those dryland activities ("cross training") actually help swimmers get faster?

As much as I wanted to believe that it could, the answer, sadly, was no. It turns out if you wanted to swim faster, you had to actually *swim*.

Along those same lines, it also turned out that if you wanted to have better turns, you had to do more of them, and work on turn technique and speed. Doing squats to "build your legs" wouldn't make your turns better by itself.

Same thing for people that had a bad freestyle flutter kick—if you were a poor kicker, doing weights to get your legs stronger wasn't the answer.

- If you want to kick better, you need to do more kicking.
- If your turns are bad, do more of them.

- And, if you want to get faster at swimming, you have to do more of it, at a higher intensity.

It comes down to the physiological principle of *specificity*. Meaning, if you want to be good at something, you need to practice the same movements, or the specific thing that you want to be good at. This is why, in our Senior program and high school teams, when we lift weights, it's viewed by me as being entirely supplemental. The in-water workouts for our elite swimmers constitute 90-95% of our final result, in my opinion.

Some of you will look at this and say, "So why do any work in the weight room?" Well, I'll tell you why:

In 2014, my SHS boys won the 200 Medley Relay State Championship by six one-hundredths of a second (.06). In 2018, our 200 medley relay, with four different boys, won that same event title by .09. And last November, our Boys 200 Free Relay won yet another State title by .05. That's three state championships that were decided by a total of *less than a quarter of a second*, or quite literally, a blink of an eye.

I'll always be convinced that the weight training made a difference, as did the work we spend on relay starts, turns, and finishes. But the weights are simply one small piece of an entire puzzle.

So, to sum up the bad news . . . if you think there's something that can totally replace water training right now, you're out of luck. And that stinks.

So, then, what's the good news? The good news is that the feeling-like-crud after a prolonged layoff isn't permanent. And, you can go through a long, long layoff—longer than anything we're likely to experience from the COVID-19—and come back better than ever with just a few short months of training. How do I know this?

Well, let me tell you a story.

A couple of years ago, I had a swimmer named Andy. He had been in the age group program since he was very young, maybe 5 or 6 years of age. His older brother, Cisco, swam for me in high school. And Andy showed some talent early on.

Andy was not a very physically big kid, but he was a very good guy, he worked hard, and he was a good teammate. In his junior year at SHS, his 200 free relay came agonizingly close to winning their own state title, finishing second at the State Meet, and in All-America time. However, he had been battling back issues and injuries during much of that year. At the end of that season, his doctors diagnosed him with a badly herniated spinal disc, and he was told to stop swimming entirely for *at least* six months. It was a very upsetting time for Andy, and I can remember telling him that I'd have a plan for him when he came back. He couldn't imagine any way that he could miss 6 to 8 months of training and still have a good senior year. It was devastating to him.

Every now and then during that following spring and summer, he'd come by the pool to say hello. He'd lost a lot of his "pool tan", and he'd also lost quite a bit of muscle mass as well—-and again, he wasn't a huge guy, so he didn't have much to lose.

It was around mid-summer that year that he came to the pool ready to get back in. He was pain free, he said, and his doctor had finally cleared him. However, he wasn't allowed to do any flip turns, and he was restricted to doing 15 to 30 minutes of easy swimming for the first days and few weeks. I recorded his first few strokes on my phone and posted it on our social media. If you saw it, it's almost painful to watch as he stiffly and slowly crawled through his first 50 yards in over half a year. However, his smile at the end was priceless. Still, he was light years away from swimming even half as well as he had before, and now, the State Meet in November was less than 16 weeks away.

By mid-September, he was finally doing some flip turns, although very, very slowly. At that point, he still wasn't allowed to do any real work. By late September, he was starting to finally feel a little better in the water, but the high school championships (Conference-District-Region-State) were fast approaching.

That November, at the State Meet in Stuart, Seminole High won their first 200 freestyle relay in school history, in school record and All-America time. Andy was the guy that anchored that relay, in 21.1, his fastest time ever. Incredible.

After six months out of the water, and with a back condition that limited how hard he could work when got back in, Andy thought his swimming career was over. Sixteen weeks later, I was putting the gold medal around his neck in Stuart. It's one of the best feelings in coaching I've ever had.

I'm not going to lie; it feels to me like we've been out of the water for a month already. And, I know many of you swimmers have got to be thinking that you just can't afford to miss much more time, and that there's no way you'll ever be able to get back to where you left off. But, you can, and you will. More importantly, you'll come back and be even *faster*. It'll take some work, of course. But trust me, *you will be faster*.

In the meantime, we all need to heed the warnings of our health professionals and do the necessary things to curtail the spread of this virus. The faster that we do that, the sooner we can resume the things that we love doing.

I miss you all terribly. One good thing about being an old coach is that I've seen just about everything in the sport, and I have a story or two about most of them. While we're down, I'm planning on writing and telling you a few of them.

So, keep your head up, don't try to control things that you can't control, try to enjoy some time with loved ones, and above all else, stay safe.

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