

Classroom Session
"Training Intelligence"

This week is all about Training Intelligence! We will go over tips and tools to take to the deck to become better racers!!

- 1) *Pre-Race Routines*
- 2) *Trust in the Process*
- 3) *Olympians Advice*

You've done the hard work in the pool. All the stomach-churning lactate sets, the early mornings, the "I'm so tired I can't feel feelings" holiday training camp.

You've set yourself up with a fancy-pants new racing suit, stocked up on shaving supplies, and are getting your butt-but to bed early even though you are *pumped* to compete.

With race day fast approaching you to want to make sure that you can channel all that hard work into a truly epic swim.

One of the ways to **crystallize your efforts is with a pre-race routine.**

Elite swimmers don't go into competition simply hoping that things will go their way. They plan and prepare to give themselves the best possible chance of success.

Here's why you should get busy creating your own pre-race routine, some examples of what the best swimmers in the world do, and we'll go through some steps to help you build a deadly pre-race routine of your own.

Let's get after it.

WHY SHOULD I USE A PRE-RACE ROUTINE?

There are a few constants in elite performers in the pool. They have poise. They thrive under pressure. They prepare for success in all they do.

And where do you think a large part of these constants come from?

Confidence in their preparation. A refusal to let their performances go to chance. The most obvious example of an elite swimmer's commitment to preparation is in training, but this attitude extends to how they prepare for competition.

Think of the pre-race routine as a swimmer's personal recipe for being physically, mentally, and emotionally ready to swim like a chlorinated gangster.

As you full well know if you've ever trained your butt off only to choke on the big day, being mentally prepared to race is critical.

How does it do that?

The pre-race routine is a primer. You do the things that get you jacked up and hyped. Your pre-race routine helps you adjust intensity and stress/excitement levels to a point that promotes high-grade swimming.

It gives you familiarity in unfamiliar situations. The pre-race routine is a plan that allows you to ignore distractions and pressure.

By focusing your energy inwards on things you can do, you are spending less anxiety-drenched attention on what's happening around you.

It gives you confidence. Done enough times, your pre-race routine becomes, well, routine. You have a set of concrete, reliable steps that you *know* will give an excellent performance. This kind of confidence is hard to fake.

It can be wielded in all types of competitive scenarios. With some tweaking and consistency, you will be able to use your pre-race routine anytime, anywhere.

"TRUST THE PROCESS"

You see it hashtagged on Instagram, you hear it in post-game interviews from other sports, and it's what your coach yells out across the pool deck when you are having a bad swim practice.

Trust the process.

The NBA's Philadelphia 76ers have made it part of their team identity as they rebuild, with fans and analysts touting that they were "trusting the process"—even as the team was consistently playing awful.

The phrase and philosophy are widely attributed to football coach Nick Saban, who developed his process of being, err, process-based with psychiatrist Dr. Lionel Rosen while Saban was a coach at Michigan State University.

Saban's realization was simple—so simple that it disguises its power: instead of getting lost in the infinite number of variables that go into winning a football game, Saban would break down things into tiny, manageable chunks.

Instead of worrying about the score, or trying to achieve a specific result, each player and coach would focus only on executing the next play. The next drill. The next step.

Since then, Saban has become the most dominant coach in college football, winning five national championships in the past 15 years, first at LSU and now at Alabama.

On the way to LSU's national championship in 2003, the pressure and expectations were growing. It was an opportunity for LSU to win their first national title

since 1958. LSU would be facing Oklahoma in the Sugar Bowl, and during team meetings in the weeks leading up to the game, Saban relentlessly stressed a process-based approach when it comes to the mindset of his players:

Every time you think of winning the national championship—stop. Instead, think of what you have to do to dominate your opponent for sixty minutes.

How Good Do You Want to Be? by Nick Saban

When LSU beat the Sooners to become national champions, Saban reflected (emphasis mine):

*In my three decades of coaching, I've learned that **the process is much more important than the result.***

This attitude echoes that of legendary NFL coach Bill Walsh, who coached the San Francisco 49ers to multiple Super Bowl wins in the 1990s. He detailed his approach to step-by-step excellence in his seminal book on leadership, *The Score Takes Care of Itself*.

He was ruthless in instituting a standard of performance that promoted excellence in every area of the organization, from the route running to how the practice helmets were treated.

They didn't achieve success by sitting down and focusing on winning a Super Bowl. They turned inwards and mastered every aspect of their own process, knowing that doing this would eventually create the results they wanted.

The result?

The 49ers went from a 2-14 football team to the dominant franchise of the 1990s, winning the Super Bowl four times, turning Montana, Rice, and Lott into the household names they are today.

THE PROCESS ON THE POOL DECK

This attitude and approach has become prevalent around the edges of the pool as well.

Bob Bowman, Michael Phelps' long-time coach, has brought this focus on the process to Arizona State University. "That man has the plan," said ASU recruit Grant House, nodding towards Bowman's office. "Every day, we have to trust the process and perform the best we can."

Nathan Adrian, perhaps the most consistent male sprinter on the planet over the past decade, has a very process-based approach when it comes to goal setting and his training.

Kylie Masse, Canadian backstroke sensation who won bronze in Rio, and then followed that up with a world record in the 100m backstroke at the 2017 Budapest World Championships, "Everyone has what works for them. I try to always keep a positive attitude. I trust the process, my coaches and support systems."

Masse's coach at the University of Toronto, Byron MacDonald—himself an Olympic finalist at the 1972 Games—echoed Masse's ability to stay present with her training and racing: "A lot of people worry about the outcome and **she just focuses on the process** and likes to challenge herself."

For swimmers who are tapering trusting the process is especially critical: it is natural—with all that surplus of energy—to start thinking about adding some last minute training, or start to feel rampant doubt. We start worrying more about performing than we do about showing up to the pool and doing our best *today*.

University of Notre Dame swimmer Rob Whitacre, when discussing the mental aspect of tapering noted the importance of staying the course and having faith in what you are doing: "But it's just trust the process, you've been doing the sets the coaches tell you to do all year. Why would you question that process now?" The phrase also figures prominently in my mental training workbook for swimmers, *Conquer the Pool*, with a section devoted exclusively to grasping and mastering the process. So, even though the phrase gets thrown around a lot, what can you, the enterprising swimmer do with it? How can a "trust the process" mindset help you become a better swimmer?

THE PROCESS HELPS YOU DO WHAT NEEDS DOING

For a moment lean back and think about all the work you need to do in order to crush your PB at the end of the season.

All those early morning workouts. The time in the gym. The improvements in technique. Tightening up your streamline. Powering up your underwaters. Improving your core strength.

The meters, on meters, on meters.

Are you sighing yet? Feeling a little overwhelmed? Paralyzed even—like, "How can I possibly do *all* that stuff?"

That's a natural reaction when we try to swallow our big goal with one bite.

Cognitively, trying to digest a year (or four) of hard work is a lot to handle. After all, swimming elite—whatever that means for you—is complex. It's chaotic. There are a thousand different variables to consider each day in and out of the water.

This sense of being overwhelmed leaves us feeling stressed, anxious, and hammers performance.

By focusing on the process you zoom out from the big picture perspective that leaves us feeling stunned

and paralyzed, and instead get up real close with *what needs doing today*.

Trusting and focusing on the process strips your goals down to the next lap and the next stroke.

This is the sneaky power of the process.

It gives us a way to clear the chaos and get some clarity of purpose. Something to latch onto when we feel overwhelmed with everything we still have to do to accomplish our goals. Breaks down something that is really, really hard and complex into something that is simple.

The process is being present, it's swimming in the moment and not allowing ourselves to be distracted by what may or may not happen tomorrow, by the swimmer in the next lane, or by focusing on anything else outside of what you are doing right now.

It's doing what you need to do.

The process looks easy. It's not. It's *simple*. Big difference.

Trusting the process is hard: It requires faith in an uncertainty. And that's why so many athletes have a difficult time with it. Because there is no sure thing, we keep looking for something better, something shinier, something more effective than what we are doing, abandoning momentum and progress for the sake of novelty.

Trusting the process is tough: There will be times where you feel like it's not working, not working fast enough, or it's simply harder than you anticipated. Going full-blown process-based with your goals is not a turn-key solution to your motivational woes: it's not as though you look in the mirror and say, "Trust the process!" and everything is smooth sailing. The process is tough because it requires you showing up and pushing failure each day in practice.

Trusting the process can be counter-intuitive.

Focusing on today's workout—and setting aside the anxiety that comes with stressing about our races—is supremely simple, but hard to do. For some swimmers, it seems ridiculous: the way to achieve my goals is to stop thinking about them? Yeah, basically. Worrying about your goals doesn't increase the chances of them coming to pass. You already *know* this. And yet we do it anyway.

Trust the plan. There will be moments where your swimming seriously needs a course correction. You need to do something new. (Just one of the reasons we race: it gives us an excellent barometer of how our training is going.) There is no denying that there will be times where your swimming is broken and needs some serious TLC. But if you are jumping ship

frequently, you aren't giving yourself a chance to allow your training to pan out.

And the biggie—trusting the process means having trust in yourself. Being fearful that we won't be okay if things don't go our way is typical. But guess what—you've been through worse before. And you will persevere through future moments of adversity and pain. You were okay yesterday, and you will be okay tomorrow.

OLYMPIC ADVICE

The history of our sport is littered with stories of triumph and adversity. There is a lot you can learn from the swimmers who have come before you.

Whether it's learning how to handle failure, bouncing back from adversity, or setting better goals, there is plenty of lessons from the stars of the sport.

Below are some pieces of advice that you can take away from some of the champion's past and present to better inform your own swimming this season.

MICHAEL PHELPS: WHAT'S YOUR WHY?

Every morning we wake up, the alarm on our phones slowly buzzing to life. We all have that same desire to stay in bed, to finally use that awesome excuse we've been keeping in our back pocket, all so that we can crush some more sleep.

Michael Phelps, the certified GOAT, made a point to have his goals written out on paper so that each morning when he woke up and felt that tantalizing pull back to the sheets he would remember his "why."

"I have my goals somewhere I can see them, so when I get out of bed I know I'm waking up to work on what I'm trying to achieve," said Phelps.

Swimming and all that is included in our sport—the early morning workouts, the test sets, the long away meets—is hard. Real hard. What makes it harder still is when we don't have a convincing "why" driving us each day in the water.

JANET EVANS: TO BE THE BEST YOU WILL NEED TO MAKE SACRIFICES.

It's tempting to think that we can be wildly successful while "having it all." But being even moderately successful at something requires sacrifices along the way. The parties that you will miss, the opportunities you miss out on—they are all given up for the sake of something bigger.

Janet Evans exhibited this all-in approach when it came to training, pulling days where she would do 20×400 IMs in practice, the last one fast enough to qualify for senior nationals. The crazy part? The set was *her* idea.

After a couple years at Stanford, and as the Barcelona Olympics were a year out, the NCAA put a cap on the amount of time student-athletes could train. A 20-hour per week limit clashed with Evans' high yardage diet, which often ran up to 35 hours per week in the water.

Evans decided to leave the school program behind so that she could continue training, giving up the student-athlete experience (P.S. She was a 4.0 student while she was there) in order to get more time in the water.

Very few of us will approach this kind of fork in the road. But it is worth asking yourself what you are willing to sacrifice in order to be successful.

ADAM PEATY: LEAVE SWIMMING AT THE POOL.

The first man to swim a :56 breaststroke relay leg, Adam Peaty knows a little something about swimming really fast breaststroke. He has been treating the sprint breaststroke world records like punching dummies since 2015.

You would think this kind of superhuman swimming would mean the dude is all-swimming, 24/7. Not so much. Peaty trains his butt off, and yet, the moment he goes home or he is away from the water there is one rule: don't talk about swimming.

"Sometimes I go downstairs and my mum and dad are watching one of my races and I tell them to switch it off," said Peaty. "If I start seeing that, I can't stop thinking about it all night which means you are losing energy where you should be gaining energy."

Does this mean you should go home and smash your mouth into a bottomless bag of Doritos? Go out with your friends and party the night before the big meet? Of course not. You can still live the lifestyle of an athlete without being obsessive about the sport while you are away from training.

"When I'm training, it's game time, but as soon as I finish a race I completely switch off," adds Peaty.

Having a balance in your life will allow you to more deeply recharge when you are away from the pool, which will help you train at a higher level and keep you from getting mentally exhausted on the sport.

KATIE LEDECKY: BE WILLING TO FAIL HARD AND REPEATEDLY.

We all have a perfectionist streak within us. For some swimmers, this means an unwillingness to push themselves in practice—finding where those limits are isn't particularly enjoyable and can be humbling. Better to keep our no-fail record in tact.

Katie Ledecky doesn't play that. She goes to work each day at the pool and essentially tries to fail. She gets that failing brings her closer to improvement.

Her coach at Nation's Capitol, Bruce Gemmell, notes that she has a relentless appetite for improvement, which includes a healthy dose of failure.

"There are days she fails catastrophically," Gemmell said. "She fails in practice more than anybody in her [training] group, because she'll start out like, 'This is the pace I need to swim in the race, so I need to replicate it in practice.' And she'll go six repeats like that, and the tank goes empty and she just falls off. But you know what? She'll come back the next day and try it again. And on the third day, she'll nail it. And she's been doing this since the first day I walked on the deck with her."

DARA TORRES: IGNORE THE DOUBTERS.

During the 1980s conventional wisdom said that to be a 15-year old female swimmer meant you were peaking. To be a 28-year old male swimmer meant you were washed up.

At the age of 14 Dara Torres broke her first world record. At 17 she won her first Olympic gold medal. After retiring she came back at the age of 32 to win five more medals at the Sydney Games in 2000. She would come back again to win three more silver medals at the age of 41 in Beijing. She did this in the face of endless doubters who said it was impossible.

People will always have an opinion about what is possible in the sport. *This is the best form of training. This is what Swimmer XYZ can accomplish. Hasn't been done before, so it's impossible.* But no one knows with full certainty. As Dara Torres said, "The water doesn't know how old you are."

What does the water know? Effort. Focus. Hard work. This isn't a wholesale indictment of doubt, or to tell you to embrace being delusional with your goals, but it is a call to be a little more aggressive with what is possible. To see for yourself what your limits are.

MEGAN QUANN (JENDRICK): VISUALIZE THE SUCCESS YOU WANT.

It's hard to overstate how much of a favorite Penny Heyns of South Africa was to win the 100m breaststroke at the Sydney Olympics. At the time she held five of the six world records in the breaststroke events in both short and long course. Heyns was also the defending Olympic champion in both breaststrokes.

This didn't matter to brash and confident 16-year old Megan Quann (now Jendrick). The young American had spent the past couple of years visualizing her races before she'd go to sleep. Each time she won gold. Her imagery included everything about the race: the temperature of the water, the crispness of her kick, the tiles at the bottom of the pool. And every time she hit the wall? New world record.

"I've been visualizing my races every night before I go to bed," she said during Olympic Trials in Indianapolis in 2000. "I visualize it with a stopwatch in my hand and every night my goal is to go a 1:05.49. I just visualized it the other day, and my time was a 1:05.47."

Although the final time would be slower than her projected WR, Quann would pull the upset to win the gold. By the time she got up on the blocks she'd already raced this *exact* race a thousand times.

As Quann showed, visualization at its best works when you don't treat it as a one-off tool that you use in case of emergency or as a last minute form of preparation. It's as essential to your training as the stretching, the lactate sets, the post-race warm-down.

GARRETT WEBER-GALE: USE VISUALIZATION TO CONQUER MOMENTS OF EXTREME ADVERSITY.

You know it is coming, *that moment in your workouts or during your race where you *die.** Your shoulders start to seize. Your kick slows to half pace, even though you will them to kick faster. Your lungs and muscles for oxygen. It isn't a pleasant experience, and yet, we somehow make it worse by not being mentally braced for it.

Garrett Weber-Gale, Olympic gold medalist and NCAA champion, would visualize that precise moment so that he would be ready for it. Even more importantly, he would picture himself conquering the moment:

"I do visualize that moment—the moment when my arms feel like sandbags," says Weber-Gale. "When my legs are burning and my back feels like it's tightening up like a rubber band. I get myself to the point where I am completely prepared for the pain. After imagining this point for a long time, I know I am able to endure the emotional stress and physical pain."

KIEREN PERKINS: EXCELLENCE REQUIRES SWIMMING AGAINST THE TIDE.

One of my childhood idols, Perkins was the dominant force in the distance freestyles throughout the 1990s. This kind of sheer domination doesn't come without difficulty, as you can well imagine.

Often the resistance we experience is from the people around us, whether it's the swimmers in the same lane or our friends at school. They deride our goals, tell us it's not a big deal, or that it's only "one practice."

The Australian distance king's advice for the swimmer with big goals? Don't let the unmotivated bring you down. Do your thing.

"That might mean doing something different to the rest of your peer group."

ANTHONY ERVIN: DON'T MAKE UNFAIR COMPARISONS.

During the lead-up to the US Olympic Trials in 2012 the coaches at Cal were working with two swimmers who couldn't be more physically different. You had Nathan Adrian, at 6'7" and 220 who looks more like an NFL player than a swimmer.

And then you had Anthony Ervin, who hadn't swum in a decade at 6'2" and 165 pounds and who couldn't get into the "get your marks" position without shaking.

During a workout at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, the group was working out in the weight room. Adrian picked up two 160-pound dumbbells and proceeded to bench press them. Yup, sports fans, that is **320 pounds** in dumbbell weight.

A couple benches over Ervin is watching the two Popeye-sized dumbbells being hurled into the air and is suddenly feeling a little silly about what he is trying to accomplish.

Cal's strength coach at the time, Nick Folker, recalled Ervin walking out the gym understandably deflated after all this: *"I am done, there is no way I can make this. How can I race a guy..."*

Comparison-making is natural and can be helpful when we use it as a motivational tool. But when we take the best of others and compare it to our weaknesses we do ourselves a disservice. **We stop focusing on the things that we do well.**

KATIE LEDECKY: THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A WASTED PRACTICE.

How often have you bailed on a practice because you felt a little sluggish? Your stroke didn't feel as awesome as usual? Or you simply weren't "feeling it"? Giving up on the rest of the swim practice where you aren't feeling the greatest is a wasted opportunity you will never get back.

Even though your stroke isn't popping there are a multitude of things you can still focus on. How tight and crisp are your turns? How is that old streamline looking? How about some drill work for the soft spots in your technique?

Katie Ledecky, for all her superhuman performances in competition, is—gasp!—just like the rest of us. She has workouts where she isn't feeling too hot, where it isn't clicking the way it ought to be.

Her game plan when that happens?

"I try to make the good days great and take something positive from the days I'm not feeling good—work on technique or something like that," says Ledecky.

One of the sneaky things that happens when you start working on your technique and form is that you begin to swim well. And when you start to swim well, you soon start swimming fast.

ADAM PEATY: BRING THE FIGHT TO CONQUER PRE-RACE ANXIETY.

I get more emails about this than anything else: I work hard in practice but can never seem to get my head right when it comes to competition.

For the perennial practice swimmer, who throws down like a boss but is unable to channel that work into a superior performance at race time, it can feel endlessly infuriating. There are a lot of reasons that things don't go your way on the blocks, but one of the more common ones is not understanding what your ideal emotional and mental state should be in those moments before the starter's gun.

Peaty learned as a teenager that to get a better performance from himself meant that he would need to ramp up the aggression.

"When I was 15, I almost hated racing in finals because I was so nervous," said Peaty. "But as I got more experienced, I had to choose between fight and flight—and I've fought every time."

Get a little mad. Get a little fired up. It will help you channel the excitement and adrenaline you are feeling into something productive.

MICHAEL ANDREW: SURROUND YOURSELF WITH YOUR GOALS.

How often do you see your goals? Are they written down? Are they somewhere you will see them, whether on your pull buoy at practice (like Katie Ledecky) or on a sheet of paper next to your bed to get you out of bed in the mornings (like Michael Phelps)?

Michael Andrew, American NAG assassin and national champion, makes a point of writing out his goals and plastering them everywhere. The point of this is familiarity—you become so accustomed to seeing your goal that you absorb it as reality instead of a dream.

“I write them out by hand. I don’t type them,” said Andrew. “I take a big piece of paper and I write it out and post it on the wall around my room and home so that I always see it. It becomes so familiar to me that I don’t notice it, because I start to believe in it so much.”

NATHAN ADRIAN: FOCUS ON BUILDING YOUR BEST RACE, THE RESULTS WILL FOLLOW.

The big goal is critical. It acts as a compass for our effort each day in practice. It is the thing we dream about at night before collapsing into sleep, and it is usually the thing that keeps us from going to Shامتown on a large pizza instead of eating something healthy.

And while setting specific goals might be motivational for some swimmers (see the previous point), 5-time Olympic gold medalist Nathan Adrian prefers a more process-based approach with swimming fast.

“There are certain people who gravitate towards different techniques of goal setting,” said Adrian, originally from Bremerton, Washington. “I’m not a guy who sets numerical goals. That’s not something that works for me really well. It’s about executing the race that I’ve planned for the entire year.”

Instead of wanting to swim “fast” consider what that race would look like technically and focus on building that performance each day in training.

CAELEB DRESSEL: REFLECT AND EVALUATE ON YOUR SWIMMING TO IMPROVE FASTER.

There are an endless number of tools and tricks that you can deploy to improve your swimming. There’s an endless pile of swimming gear: different types of paddles, DragSox, short fins, long fins, super suits and everything in between.

One of the time-tested tools is a simple notebook and a pen. The swimmer’s log book.

Sprint monster Caeleb Dressel has been using log books since he was an age grouper, sometimes hopping out of the water mid-session to pen thoughts on something he was experiencing in the water while it was fresh in his mind.

Jason Calanog, the coach who helped develop Dressel as a youngster with the Bolles Sharks, recommended that the young star write out his workouts.

“His entries were definitely at a higher level than I’ve ever seen by a swimmer,” Calanog said. “He’d write pages and pages about how every muscle felt and what he wanted his stroke to feel like.”

While a lot of swimmers will write out their workout, they won’t reflect and evaluate on what they are doing. They will stick to volume and intervals. In essence, they are robbing themselves of the principal benefit of logging those workouts—the ability to learn and improve more quickly.

SARAH SJOSTROM: RACE LOTS, IT WILL HELP YOU LEARN TO DEAL WITH BAD RACES.

Competition is daunting for many swimmers. We invest hours and hours in training in order to get up on the block and have the perfect race. No pressure, right? So you can imagine how hard it then becomes to bounce back in the middle of a big meet when your first race doesn’t go according to plan.

Sweden’s Sarah Sjostrom, the fastest 50 and 100m freestyler in history, credits her ability to refocus after a race, good or bad, for her consistency in competition.

She credits getting up on the blocks as often as possible—in particular with the FINA World Cup Series—to help condition this type of mental resiliency, “It is always about refocusing. It is a lot of racing.”

ALEX POPOV: BE RELENTLESS ABOUT TECHNICAL PERFECTION.

The man dominated the sprint freestyle events for the better part of a decade, winning back to back gold medals in the 50 and 100m freestyles. For Russian Alex Popov, there was always something he could improve on with his technique. Always a slight edge to be found.

During training his coach Gennadi Touretski would often prescribe long, unbroken sets of straight freestyle swimming (up to 5,000m straight). The point? To swim with perfect technique or not at all. Popov would speed up to a point where his technique would start to fall apart before backing off.

With each stroke cycle, with each lap Popov was building perhaps the most efficient freestyle in the history of the sport. Consider this—when he broke the world record for the 50m freestyle at Russia’s Olympic Trials in 2000 he swam 21.64 with just 31 strokes.

VLADIMIR SALNIKOV: ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS ALMOST ALWAYS TAKES LONGER THAN YOU EXPECT.

At the 1980 Olympics in Moscow Vladimir Salnikov became the first man in history to crack the 15-minute barrier in the mile. The only problem? The gold medal felt hollow without the western world there, boycotting to protest the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Four years later the Russians boycotted the LA Games. Through all this Salnikov kept training, all in the hopes of eventually winning an Olympic gold medal with the whole world present.

At the Seoul Olympics in 1988, a competition where his own swimming federation didn't want to bring him because they considered him washed up, Salnikov would soldier through the final of the 1500m, finally winning that elusive gold medal.

That night entering the Olympic village he was given a standing ovation by athletes of every country, every sport. Our goals tend to take longer than we expect to accomplish them, which will only make them sweeter.

JASON LEZAK: IT'S NEVER OVER.

You know what race I'm going to bring up. *That* race. The infamous relay leg at the Beijing Olympics.

With Jason Lezak on the anchor leg faced off against the former world record holder Alain Bernard of France, gold for the Americans seemed an impossibility. Lezak pulled the miracle, swimming a 46.0 to out-touch the French at the wall and give the Americans gold and Phelps a chance at completing his 8-gold medal winning haul.

It's never over. Don't give up.

ANTHONY NESTY: THE DETAILS MATTER.

At the 1988 Seoul Olympics Matt Biondi was favored to win a whole bunch of events, including the 100m butterfly. And for 99m of the race, he was doing just that.

But as Biondi charged into the wall he was faced with the dilemma of gliding into the wall or finishing on a half stroke. He chose to glide, and during that fraction of a second Anthony Nesty of Suriname closed on a full stroke to take the gold.

These are the seemingly minor details that you work on in practice so that you don't have to roll the dice in competition. Streamline, a tight turn, not breathing into the walls, finishing on a full stroke—these are basic and seemingly rudimentary skills that only get more critical as you develop as an athlete.

MIKE BURTON: HARD WORK DEFINES WHAT IS POSSIBLE.

You only truly learn what you can do by working your tail off. By pushing yourself as close as you can to the edge. You can easily tell yourself that you can't do a bunch of fast 50s under 30 seconds off the blocks, or an extra couple workouts, or stay after practice to run stairs, but the moment you do it, the quicker what you think is possible begins to change.

Olympic champion distance ace Mike Burton, who trained with Mark Spitz under Sherm Chavoor, reminisced on a Saturday morning practice where the group did a 1650 for time...after already having done a two hour workout.

"I was so shot afterward. I've never been that tired in my life, neither before nor after that Saturday," he said years later, smiling. "But I knew from that point on that there was nothing Sherm could give me that I couldn't handle."

KYLIE MASSE: TRUST THE PROCESS.

If you've heard it once, you've likely heard it a thousand times: Trust the process, the results will take care of themselves.

As swimmers our eyes are constantly on the horizon looking for medals, records, and best times. Even though we have work to do today, we stress and get anxious over the results down the line. But by focusing on the process—the day to day pursuit of excellence—we retain control over our preparation that infuses us with confidence.

Kylie's coach Byron MacDonald, himself an Olympian, notes, "A lot of people worry about the outcome and **she just focuses on the process** and likes to challenge herself."

