

3 Types of Swimmer: In Season Sensation, Taper Talent, and Forever Fast Phenom



Photo Courtesy: Peter H. Bick

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After watching the [Minneapolis Arena Pro Series](#) this past weekend, I could not help but empathize with those swimmers who seemed to be swimming through mud. Coaches try to convey to age group parents routinely– this is part of the process, fast times are not meant to come mid-season, they will be there when it counts.

But swimmers know there are those phenomenal swimmers, enduring the same grind they are, who somehow put together times fringing their best times, in season. How? I often asked the

question as a swimmer who felt as if I was dragging another swimmer behind me during every in-season race.

This may be a narrow view, but in the most simplistic language, there are three types of swimmer: the in-season sensation, the taper talent, and the forever fast phenom. Let's dive into a brief case study of each...

1. The In-Season Sensation



Photo Courtesy: Maddy Olson

You know the type. They rock in practice. They carry the team during in-season meets, but they cannot seem to put it together at the end of the season. They're the ones whose bodies seem to hate taper, bless their hearts. Yes, often times it's not a problem with their tapers, but a problem with their head during taper. Sometimes, especially among younger athletes, confidence is garnered solely from training. As yardage decreases and other bodies recover, these swimmers do not feel as ahead of the field as they were in-season. This may stir up some panic or at least kick the confidence down a few notches. The big meet rolls around, and rather than being excited to race rested, this breed is fearful that they're out of shape from taper. This shaken foundation is

a lack of faith in the taper and perhaps a lack of mental preparation to handle the higher stakes at big meets.

There is always room for redemption for you in-season swimmers! The best news is that your mind can be trained. The end-of-season meet is often built up to be the climax of your life, but a reality check will make you realize that the world will keep spinning before, during, and after your big meet. Competition was not created to be feared, but to be celebrated. The comrades in those lanes beside you help extract your body's finest work. Allow the season to build your confidence, then allow the ultimate competition to be an exhibition of the the speed refined throughout the season.

2. The Taper Talent



Photo Courtesy: Swimming World.TV

This was me. But I never wore a cape or a crown. Going into every season, I knew my musculature broke down, and it broke down hard during heavy training. There were times I crouched to take my mark at college dual meets and I thought my hamstrings might pop because they were strung so tightly from squatting, running, and infinite breaststroke kicking. I was in survival mode during many in-season races, trusting that I was tearing at my body to build

something incredible– but that final product that would not be revealed until NCAAs. If you're this type of swimmer, the season can be miserable *if* you allow yourself to constantly compare. The way your body recovers is unique– just because your teammates share your training load does not mean you process it the same way.

Your weapon of defense is trust. Not allowing yourself to see a time 14 seconds off your best 200 and falling into a pit of despair. Your in-season racing is not in vain; you're reminding your body how to race, and trusting it will feel (at least) 10 times better come taper time.

The temptation of we taper talents is to just throw in the towel on in-season racing. We feel like poop in the pool, our times are routinely mediocre, so what's to keep you from just waiting until you feel good? A few things. One, racing hard is one of the most important components of training. Two, you most likely have teammates counting on you and watching your efforts. Three, you have coaches who know when you're putting forth less than your broken down best.

You may surprise yourself and slowly start to morph into a #3...

3. The Forever Fast Phenom



Photo Courtesy: Arizona Republic-USA TODAY Sports

Let's be clear– I just like alliteration; no one is “forever fast.” Okay, maybe **Katie Ledecky**. But even she will shake her head after a race that didn't go as well as she had liked. The best of the best love to race and refuse to not to exert themselves when in race mode. It doesn't matter if it's racing kids in a swim clinic, going off the blocks in practice, or racing in an Olympic final. The finest swimmers have a switch without a fader, it's either off or it's on. Most Olympians are able to be within a couple seconds of their best time in a 100 in-season. That may not sound impressive to an age grouper, but when your best time is a world record, being within a couple of seconds is still scorching fast.

I recently read Olympian **Jessica Hardy**'s book “Swimming Toward the Gold Lining.” She recounted her emotional comeback journey after a positive drug test at the 2008 Olympic Trials. One of the anecdotes which stood out most to me was the story of a 50 breaststroke she swam at her comeback meet in 2009. The nation's top swimmers were competing at World Championships in Rome, where world records were dropping like the sweat of the swimmers wriggling into those polyurethane super suits. Hardy was not there due to her suspension, but she watched on T.V. as her world records went down, then she prepared to uncork at the 2009 U.S. Open in Federal Way, Washington.

Time trials take place between sessions; stands are typically empty and competition is sparse...the atmosphere is just begging you to go back to the hotel and take a nap. Hardy time trialed a 50-meter breaststroke. She broke the world record (becoming the first woman to break 30 seconds) to the echo of her family's applause. That's a racer. If you look up and down the National team lineup and glanced at times from last weekend's Arena Pro Series meet, you see these pros manage their unrested races well. They take *every* race seriously.

For the younger audience, maybe you've just blown through that joyous time of your life where you take time off in every race every time you swim. It's an adjustment– learning how to be proud of a race, even if it was not a best time. We all aspire to be #3s– the type that will not allow feel to dictate performance in-season or fear to dictate performance at the big dance. Never complacent, always expectant.