

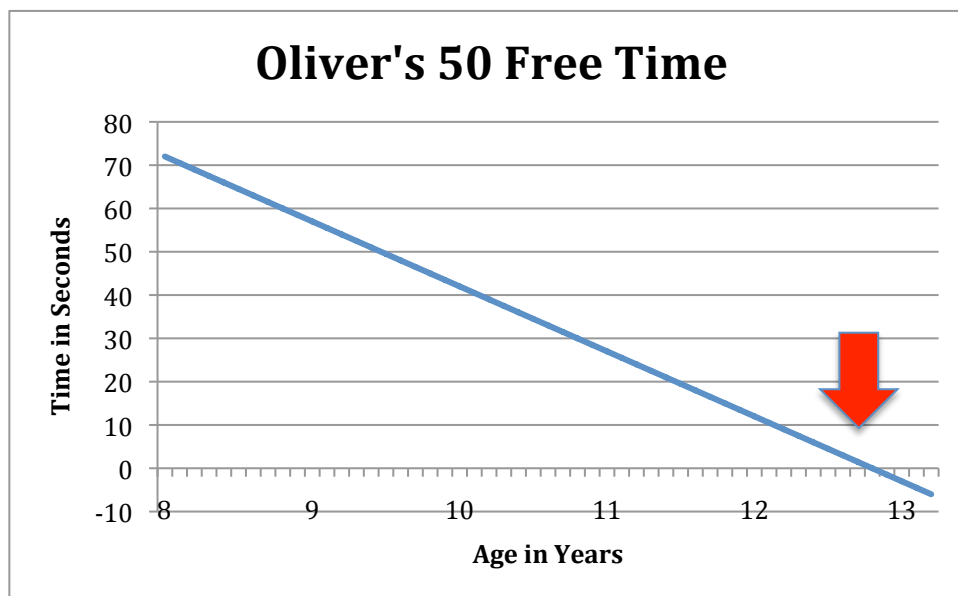
Adding Time and Dropping Time (and Plateaus) – It's All NORMAL!!!

As you continue along your swimming career, there are some mantras:

Thou shall drop time. Thou shall add time. Sometimes thou shall plateau.

We seem to have this expectation that we should achieve a personal best every single time we swim a race. After all, we have great coaches, we attend practices regularly, and we are working hard, right? Think again, gentle swimmer.

Let's take our fictional NFS swimmer "Oliver" as an example. Oliver started swimming during Summer League. Oliver performed his 25 free in 2 minutes and 2 seconds at the age of 5. Throughout the season, Oliver figures out that swimming freestyle consists of more than a wild dog paddle. The next year, Oliver opens the season by swimming a 25 free in a stellar 1 minute and 16 seconds (a drop of 46 seconds!). Oliver's parents beam at him, for surely he is a future Olympian. By the time he is 8, his parents figure out that "Phelps Junior" needs year round world class coaching, so obviously he comes to NFS. Oliver swims his 50 freestyle in 1 minute and 10 seconds. Oliver will swim about 12 races a year, and based on Oliver's incredible historical performance, surely we can expect a conservative time drop of 1.5 seconds every time he swims a race.



So, as you can see, Oliver continues to drop time steadily as he gets older. Based on the graph above, Oliver will swim the 50 free in 27 seconds when he is 11 years, old, and by the time he is almost 13, he will swim it in (literally) no time at all! In fact, when he is 13, Oliver will finish the race before it even begins! Go Oliver! But it is reality check time...clearly, there is a flaw in this logic. You simply cannot drop time

every time you swim. As amazing as you are, you can never finish the race in 0 seconds (or less). Sorry.

So, what is normal? Normal is this: You are going to drop time. You are going to add time. You may go through a stage where your times just seem to be “stuck”, or you can’t achieve your personal bests for an extended period of time (a plateau). The plateau phase is a common occurrence at any age, but seems to happen more often the older you get. (Here’s a great example: a certain Mel Nash (that’s right...your beloved Coach, Mel Nash) won Senior Nationals for 100 Back, but then was not able to best this time for another 3 years and 10 months. *Oh, and when he did, he just happened to place **3rd in the World** for 100 Back*). Some reasons for hitting the plateau, or for adding time include, but are not limited to the following: necessary stroke correction, growth spurts / body changes, focusing on technique and tactics during a race, type of training within the season, etc. It does NOT mean there is something wrong. It does NOT mean you are not trying hard. Another reason may be with respect to you and swim practice. Not focusing on and trying to master what your coaches are telling you to do may be a factor. Not giving it your “all” during the workout may work against you. A sporadic workout attendance will not reap optimal benefits. There is a “curriculum of study” within the workouts, with different days focusing on different things (ex. low intensity, specific strokes, high intensity, starts, finishes, turns, etc.) A spotty attendance record may mean you are missing out on some pretty important instruction, reinforcement and complementary training.

So what can you do? Try to attend practice regularly per the recommended number of times / days per your group. You can take the pressure off by concentrating on other strokes and swimming other events at races. Focusing on the technique and not worrying about the time is another tactic. A race is so much more than just the final time at the end. There are certain elements within a race that are very important to master. You may have just added time (again!) and are disheartened, but your coaches may be positively thrilled with your race. What thrills your coaches? Not breathing off the walls. Nice and efficient turns. Powerful starts and finishes. Good stroke technique within the race. Remember, sometimes you have to go slow to go fast. Focus on good technique on all the elements within your race. Stop defining a “good” race simply by time. Swimming is a “process”. Talk to some of your fellow swimmers. Many of our swimmers have been through this before (or are going through it). Talk to your coaches (...need we say again, 3 years and 10 months?!). Educate yourself by visiting swimming websites, reading about elite swimmers, reading the Splash magazine we all get, etc. The more you educate yourself, the more you shall realize that you’re not alone, and what you’re going through is NORMAL!

...And remember our mantra, gentle swimmer:

Thou shall drop time. Thou shall add time. Sometimes thou shall plateau.