

THE PERILS OF TRAINING EQUIPMENT

Every evening's practice brings its equipment crises. If I were more creative, I could write a soap opera script about our missing pull buoys and incorrectly adjusted goggles and forgotten suits and the myriad of excuses our swimmers come up with to explain it all. And while the problem may be amusing, it is also important. If Lewis Hamilton's crew forgets to bring tires to the race, he's not winning this weekend. And if, in the old days of my youth, Bjorn Daehlie's wax was wrong for the snow conditions, he finished minutes behind instead of minutes ahead of his competition. In swimming, properly functioning training equipment enables you to do the training program and to get maximum benefit from that program. You cannot get much from a set if you are stopping every 50 to fix your goggles; and you cannot get the planned benefit from a pulling set if you don't have a buoy or paddles.

There is no excuse for not preparing well, and part of our Waves champions' preparation includes ensuring that we have all our equipment and that it is in functioning order every day at practice. Here are a few simple principles for dealing with your stuff:

If you lose it, replace it. Everyday I hear the same chorus from the same swimmers: "I lost my paddles (or my fins, or whatever)!" Well, that excuse works exactly once. If you come to practice one day and find a piece of equipment missing, then it is up to you to move heaven and earth to find it, and that failing, to replace it immediately, presumably before the next practice. If you are missing a knife and fork at the table, are you just going to eat the mashed potatoes and spinach with your hands? If you lose your pencil, are you going to attend math class for the rest of the year without a pencil?

If it doesn't work, have a spare that does. This is especially true for the Big Three: suit, goggles, and cap. In addition to your regular set of these essentials, put an extra set in a separate pouch in your swim bag, so you have them for emergencies. In a pinch, you can get away with all but these.

If it still doesn't work, swim through it. You're not getting anything done in practice if you are stopping all the time. Further, if practice is preparation for meets, then we should try to act in practice like we want to act in meets. If our goggles come off on the start – or if we breathe in some water, or get water in our eyes, or misjudge a turn – do we want to stop and ruin our race? Of course not. We want to race through every "bother." And to ensure we do the right thing in races, we must practice swimming through "bothers" every day in practice. Although it may be uncomfortable, surely the slight leak in our goggles isn't so insurmountable an obstacle that we can't finish the repeat before we fix the leak. We must build a habit of not immediately responding to every little thing that happens. This builds toughness and the ability to focus, both of which are necessary for champions.

Put your name on it. All swim bags look alike. All green Strokemaker paddles look alike. The only way to ensure that you have your stuff and not someone else's is to

put your name on it, in big letters with indelible ink, and preferably more than once on each item. And even then, expect that occasionally you will end up with someone else's buoy and they will have yours.

Take it with you when you leave. Every day at practice I have a multitude of swimmers complain that “someone” took one of their paddles, or a fin, or a pull-buoy, etc. out of their swim bag. From the sounds of it, a horde of gremlins is stealing into everyone's swim bags. Perhaps. Or maybe the explanation is more prosaic: swimmers are simply leaving their equipment on the deck after practice. That would certainly explain the piles of stuff that the coaches have to put away every night. And it would coincide with what many swimmers' parents tell me about the messiness of their kids' rooms at home. The best way to make sure you have all your equipment is to carefully put it in your bag after practice, then to put your bag away. Gremlins don't like neatness and order, so they will stay away from your stuff.

Michael Brooks
Weymouth Waves
Fall 2019