

S. Jill Black, PhD

Coaching Philosophy

Personal Philosophy

Daniel Chambliss (1989) says that "the swimming world is best conceived of not as a single entity but as multiple worlds, each with its own pattern of conduct." That is, there are different levels within the swimming community and they are qualitatively distinct in terms of technique, discipline, and attitude. Since entering the world of competitive swimming in 1973, I have observed and experienced these diverse levels.

Indeed, my personal athletic background is from the "top" level of swimming. Several of my teammates earned trips to world competitions, some even earned Olympic medals. Excellence in terms of technique, discipline, and attitude were expected daily. As a coach, I have had the honor of working with swimmers and teams of similar philosophies. In contrast, I have assisted swim teams in which technique, discipline, and attitude were not priorities.

I am committed to excellence in all areas of competitive swimming: technique, training habits, citizenship, and racing opportunities; I expect reciprocal commitments from the athletes I work with. My main coaching objective is to develop athletes to their full potentials.

Technique

- Technique first, train second. I was fortunate to swim under the direction of Ron Jacks, a stroke "perfectionist" who swam in the late 1960's with Doc Counsilman at the University of Indiana.
- Change is necessary. Technique development is achieved only if athletes are open and committed to perfection.

Discipline

- There is no substitute for hard work.
- Self-awareness and personal accountability are essential.

Attitude

- Every athlete counts.
- Promote citizenship.
- Winning is not just about #1. My vision is that all athletes leave their competitive swimming careers with heads held high. Too often emphasis is placed on performance outcomes and not on how to get there. Top performances result from "well-rounded" athletes. Moreover, the more coaches focus on the process (i.e., attention to technique, discipline, and attitude), the faster our athletes will swim.

Training Considerations

Daily training plans should consider the ratio of technique instruction to training, sensitive periods of development, and long-term awareness. I design my yearly and weekly plans with the following considerations in mind.

Technique Instruction vs. Training

- Emphasis on technique instruction varies by age and competitive swimming experience (i.e., developmental factors). The table below highlights the ratio of technique instruction to training for differing age-groups. This information was derived from Pat Hogan (2002) and Bill Sweetenham (2006).

Age	Technique/Training	Practices/Week	Yards/Week
8 + 1	90/10	3	2-6,000
10 + 2	80/20-70/30	4	6-12,000
12 (girls) + 1 & 13 (boys) + 1	60/40-50/50	4-6	12-20,000
14 + 2	40/60-20/80	6-10	20-60,000

Sensitive Periods

- Research by Sokolovas and Herr (2002) reveals optimal age ranges, or sensitive periods, to develop certain physical competencies. For example, girls can best maximize flexibility at ages 6-12 and boys at ages 7-13. Balance is best maximized at ages 8-10 for girls, 9-11 for boys. Agility is best maximized at ages 9-11 for girls and 10-12 for boys. Endurance is best maximized at ages 11-13 for girls and 12-14 for boys. Strength is best maximized at ages 13-15 for girls and 14-16 for boys.
- Sensitive periods suggest the following training stages: development of aerobic capacity should be emphasized when girls are 11-13 years and boys are 12-14 years. Anaerobic capacity should be emphasized when girls are 13-14 years and boys are 14-15 years. Finally, strength and power should be emphasized when girls are 14-15 years and boys are 15-16 years.

Long-Term Approach

- About half the number of US swimmers ranked in the Top 100 at age 17-18 years were "new" swimmers, not previously ranked in the Top 100 at any age (Sokolovas, 2002). In other words, most of our future elite swimmers do not rank in the Top 100 until aged 15-16 years. Sokolovas also reports that elite-level swimmers change their events during their careers until ages 13-14 for girls and 15-16 for boys. Therefore, early specialization may limit success.

References

Chambliss, D. F. (1989). The mundanity of excellence: An ethnographic report on stratification and olympic swimmers. Sociological Theory, Vol. 7: 70-86.

Hogan, P. (2002). Profile of success: Understanding the success of Mecklenburg Aquatics Club. Report presented at the Mini Expo Oregon Swimming Conference, Lincoln City, Oregon.

Sokolovas, G. (2002). Participation of elite swimmers: From USA swimming's all-time top 100 times. Coaches Quarterly, Vol. 8: 1-5.

Sokolovas, G. & Herr, L. (2002). Long-term training in swimming. Coaches Quarterly, Vol. 8: 15-19.

Sweetenham, B. (2006). Break Point Volume. American Swimming Magazine, Vol. 2006, Issue 2, 34-36.