

The Benefits of Training with Your Rival

By Caitlin Daday

In swimming we often find ourselves up against the same people almost every time we race. These people, our rivals, make the sport as intense as it is challenging. Sometimes our rivals may seem like our bitter enemies—it is true it often feels like they are out to get us. In reality, we can benefit from our challengers. It may not be easy to see, but training alongside your competition will only serve to make you better. Here are some reasons why there are benefits of training with your rival.

1. Your rival challenges you every day.

When you train with your rival, every day is race day. Every practice you go head-to-head, simulating your next race. Your life is a constant duel in the pool, and each session enhances your ability to race and drive to win. Training next to your competition pushes you to work as hard as they do. Their presence reminds you that you can never take a day off because you never want them to think they have the upper hand. Knowing you both want the same thing, you push each other to your absolute limits. Training at this level and intensity everyday will only make you better.

2. You know your competition inside and out.

Training with someone day after day obviously helps you get to know them. You not only experience their personality, but you also learn how they swim. You come to know if they like to take out their races or save up, or any other strengths or weaknesses they may have. Knowing all this, you can work to strengthen your own race. For example, in a 400 IM, if you know they have you in breaststroke, you make sure you get out in front during fly and back. Knowing how your competitor races puts you a step ahead. This knowledge allows you to prepare your own strengths so you know you will be able to get to the wall first. It is true that if you train together the other person knows your strengths and weaknesses as well, but in the end it will only make the race better.

3. They give you perspective and keep you humble.

Swimming with your rival does not only help you on race day, but it also reminds you that you are not the only person out there that works hard and deserves to reach their goals. Sometimes it can be frustrating when we don't get what we want, and it is easy to say that we deserve something more than someone else because we are sure we worked harder for it. In truth, the person who ultimately gets the win probably did work hard too, and when you see your training partner straining towards their goals alongside you every day, you know they deserve it too...even if it is hard to admit. I am not saying that losing is necessarily easy when it is to someone with whom you are close, but knowing firsthand that they have done the work alongside you is humbling.

4. It gives you someone to forge through the struggles with.

Reaching your goals will never be easy, but having someone next to you who wants the same thing helps you get through the tough times. You are always going to have them right there next to you, motivating you the whole way. The work is more bearable when someone else is enduring the load as well. Your training partner also keeps you positive and gives you a reason to stay positive. The work you are putting in is not just for you—it's for them too. When you are training side-by-side, you are making each other better no matter who is on top of the podium at the end of the day. If you both are willing to put in the work and to challenge each other, you will both reap the benefits in the end.

Training with your rival may seem contradictory, but in reality it's a gift. Nothing will ever benefit you more than having someone striving for the exact same thing in the lane right next to you every single day. You will never get better without someone to challenge you, and that is exactly what your training partner does.