

Master Strokes. Think and train like an Olympian.

Recently I attended the ASCTA convention on the Gold Coast to receive my National Masters Coaching Award. It was a wonderful weekend being surrounded by coaching royalty! Craig Smith (our Masters Swimming Australia President) and I were on the same table as John Konrads at the Awards Dinner and I was fortunate to attend a few sessions given by eminent coaches such as Doug Frost, Wayne Goldsmith and Gregg Troy.



Anne and Craig



Anne and John Konrads

At the workshops, it was interesting to realise that there is major correlation between the elite squads and Masters Swimming Clubs. Our philosophy and training programs are very similar – most of us though don't have the same training regime of 12 sessions/week and mileage! But we all have the same aspirations to improve our strokes and times and set goals to motivate us. Our goals may be modest, such completing 100m Butterfly, but are as important and motivating to the individual as the young elite swimmer's goal of an Olympic berth.

I have jotted down a few of the points from the ASCTA sessions I attended highlighting those similarities between Masters and Elite swimmers.

Goals - *Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goals!*

Everyone needs goals to work towards. These goals should be achievable; they need to be reviewed and reflected upon. Just like the elite Swimmers, it is really important for Masters Swimmers to set long-term and short-term goals. But they need to be realistic, given the other demands of life you have as a Masters Swimmer – work, family etc. Speaking from experience, it is very easy to sit on the couch with a glass or 2 of wine..... But if I have entered a big meet I KNOW I just have to get off the couch and to the pool.

Attitude - *No train, no gain.*

As with the elite swimmers, Masters should be self-motivated and accountable for their training ethic – be on time, listen to the coach and train to the best of your ability. Probably the difference between young elite swimmers and Masters is that, as adults, we are essentially in charge of ourselves. We have no problem telling a coach why we are not going to swim the set exactly as set out! e.g. – the need to wear fins in fly to take strain off shoulders! We are accountable to ourselves for our attendance and training ethic.

Planning – *Without planning there is no performance.*

Programs need to be written based on cycles. In preparation for the main targeted meet, the cycle starts 12-16 weeks out from this. Like the elite squads, our programs should work through the 3 main phases of Aerobic, Anaerobic and Quality. In the Pre- Competition Phase, it is good to have a race rehearsal. The Elites will rehearse a race day like it is the real thing – down to the finest details of what to eat, doing the same warm-up and cool down. We can follow this practice as well – but in a modified form. Like the elite swimmers, tapering is an individual thing based on the events and sex. Female and older swimmers may take longer to taper due to body composition.

Swim Sessions. *Don't count the laps- make the laps count*

Coaches need to provide a positive supportive environment with stimulating and challenging programs.

- Elite swimmers do drills too! It is important to get technique right – give time to swim slowly correctly in order to swim fast correctly.
- Kick is really important! 15% of swim session should be a kick set.
- In every session there should be a fast swimming set. *You need to train fast to swim fast.* It does not have to be much – just a short burst of all out effort. We call them Heart Starters at Tuggeranong, e.g. 4 x 25 flat –out fast!!
- Speed and relaxation go together – you can't go fast if your stroke is not relaxed.
- Sprint swimmers need to do distance work. The example given was from Gregg Troy, Head Coach University of Florida, analysing the USA 4 x 100m relay team at London Olympics – 3 were distance swimmers –but they were also top class sprinters.
- IM sets are a great base for all swimmers to build all round fitness and feel of the water. Doug Frost is a great advocate of this training his younger swimmers. Thorpey was a top class backstroke swimmer in his younger days.



Core strength and flexibility - *Use it or lose it.*

As with elite swimmers it is essential that time is spent working on core strength and flexibility. This is so important in trying to ward off the effects of aging. Those youthful rippling six packs of hard iron core strength of the young elite may still be there -just buried under a few layers of excess! All strokes need a strong core and flexibility. So cross-train as the elite swimmers do – go to the gym, do Pilates and Weights. Resistance bands, Fit Balls, medicine balls are great and remember to *stretch*.



So as we head towards the cooler months, *train like an elite swimmer!* It is a good time to work on your strokes through drills and focus on your technique- nobody has a perfect stroke. Have a focus for a week on a stroke to really work on a specific area to improve. Aim to improve your kick and underwater work and keep a good aerobic base going through winter. Go the gym and get that rippling six-pack! Remember just keep active and keep swimming.

As Dara Torres, a silver medallist Olympian at age 41, said, *“The water doesn't know your age.”*

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Masters National Coach of the Year 2014

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