Groove to the Music to Improve Swim Performance

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Introduction

Existing research using dry land exercise-related activities such as running and indoor rowing has shown that the use of music in training and racing can lead to a range of benefits that include enhanced feelings, lower perceived exertion, greater energy efficiency, and faster time trial performances. The purpose of this British study was to assess the psychological, psychophysical, and performance effects of music on swim performance.

The Research

Twenty six male and female college club level swimmers (18–23 years) underwent a 3-week period of getting used to a Speedo Aquabeat MP3 players prior to the actual testing trials. They then did two experimental trials (motivational and non-motivational music chosen by swimmers and their friends at 130 beats per minute) and a no-music control, during which they engaged in a 200-m freestyle swimming time trial in a heated 25m pool. Following a standard 5-minute warm-up, 200m swim performance, heart rate, rating of perceived exertion (how hard did it feel on a 0-10 scale), level of focus (focused on how body felt, wasn’t focused on body sensations, or wished swim would finish), level of motivation (0-10 point scale) were measured during and after each of the three 200m swims held a week apart.

The Results

The club level swimmers swam significantly faster by approximately 2% when exposed to either the motivational (2m 53s) or non-motivational music (2m 54s) compared to the no music (2m 57s) condition. Moreover, both the music conditions were associated with higher levels of motivation and less focus on body sensations than when not listening to music.

So What?

The findings of this study support the belief that the use of music during high-intensity swim training can have a positive effect on swim performance. The use of music, regardless of its motivational qualities, also resulted in higher self-reported motivation as well as more dissociative (thinking of things other than the effort) thoughts.