



# Off The Blocks



## 5 Way to Get the Most Out of Your Swim Practice...by Olivier Poirier-Leroy

Happy New Year!

I hope everyone had a great Holiday season and that your break from training (if you had one) was relaxing. For those that trained over the break, I'm sure it was a lot of hard work but you are all better for it and are continuing to move in the right direction. March Championships are only 8-9 weeks away so keep working hard and you will be rewarded in the end!

Bill Marlin

PVS General Chair

As a competitive swimmer we are always looking for new ways to get the edge on our fellow athlete. Whether it's a new suit or a new dry-land routine, we'll scoop to some extensive lengths to get a leg up. Instead of trying to make time for more training, more meters (yards), more of this or more of that, focus on making the most of your current

practices.

Here are 5 ways to squeeze the most out of the time you spend in the pool—

**1. Set micro goals.** Set goals for individual workouts, even down to specific sets and repeats. As a recovering distance swimmer, this was one of the ways that I kept myself sane during those long, lonely sets. Eye-balling the

clock and wanting to turn under a specific time kept my head in the set and ultimately pushed me to swim faster.

Set marks and targets for your sets so that you have something to chase during practice, instead of strictly trying to survive the set.

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## Swimmers, Apply for the PVS Athlete's Committee

The Athlete Committee will be a standing advisory committee that will make proposals as well as provide advice and consent to the BoD regarding governance issues that are important to athletes. The committee will consist of the following voting members chosen by the chair of the committee: ; athletes on the Officials Committee (2), the

Technical Committee (1), the Competition Committee (2), the Audit/Finance Committee (1), and the Diversity and Inclusion Committee (2) as well as the current BoD Athlete Representatives. The committee members (excluding the chair and BoD representatives; which will serve two, two year terms) will be allowed to serve up to

three, one-year terms on the committee total. All members selected must be a current member of Potomac Valley Swimming and USA Swimming and must be at least 16 years of age. One term year will be from September 1st - August 31st. Robert's Rules of Order will govern the meetings, and majority rules on all votes. [Application](#)

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## The Secrets of the Chinese

...by *Dan McCarthy*, National Team High Performance Consultant

There is a fantastic video making rounds on the internet that provides some behind-the-scenes training footage of the Chinese Olympic Diving Team. The video was posted by Rett Larson on July 23, 2014.

If you haven't seen it, check it out: <http://youtu.be/cdh0XtXEmgI>

Despite the fact that both sports take place in the pool, diving and swimming couldn't be more different. However, there is plenty to learn, especially when the example is the best in the world at something. Like USA Swimming, Chinese Diving has been dominant at the Olympic level. Since 1984, the Chinese have won 20 out of 32 gold medals, and 38 out of 96 total medals!

After watching the video and reading a little bit more about the training of the Chinese National Diving Team, I came up with three big takeaways that seem to be applicable to swimming.

**1. Practice the basics every day.** The first ten

dives in practice for an Olympic medalist might be a simple sit dive. Practice turns, streamlines and underwater kicking every day. Merely saying that every turn of every set is an opportunity to work on your turns is disregarding the fact that isolated, focused attention to the basics will yield better results than trying to survive an intense set, and – oh by the way – making sure to execute perfect turns at each wall also.

**2. Push the boundaries of an athlete's capabilities in practice and praise the effort, not the result.** At about the two-minute mark of the video, one of the divers tries a ridiculous handstand dive, which has never been attempted before, and gets destroyed! Not only is the attempt awesome, but the exuberant reaction of his coaches and teammates sends a clear message: We value going beyond perceived abilities, regardless of the outcome. Fear of failure is unacceptable! "Get Out Swims" and challenge sets are similar opportunities for swimmers, but is the reward only in

beating a given time or average? What if an athlete, or group of athletes, stepped beyond what they are normally capable of doing? The failed attempt at an overwhelming task in practice may lay the groundwork for an amazing breakthrough in the future, if it is properly acknowledged.

**3. Provide constant coaching and feedback.** In nearly every frame of the video, there is a coach or a trainer providing a short phrase of encouragement or feedback on a repetition. Do not miss an opportunity to correct, reinforce or motivate an athlete. Sometimes, a phrase as simple as, "Good job! Keep it up!" is all that is necessary to encourage an athlete to complete the challenge in front of them, and to do it well.

**If it's important to you, you will find a way. If not, you'll find an excuse.**

## HOW TO EVALUATE BUTTERFLY TECHNIQUE

BY RUSSELL MARK, NATIONAL TEAM HIGH PERFORMANCE CONSULTANT

Whenever I'm at a pool now or watching film, it's automatic: my eyes zone into the subtle movements of a swimmer while my mind processes all the information to make a preliminary evaluation of technique.

A short 10+ years ago, it was completely opposite, though. I would look at a pool and just see a mess of moving body parts. Coaches would say this and that about a swimmer's stroke like it was totally obvious, and I would nod in agreement even though it all looked the same to me. My eyes were open and I was looking... but not seeing anything.

Over time, by asking many questions and prioritizing what's important to a good stroke, the body movement doesn't look so random anymore. Nobody ever taught me how to look at strokes, and I don't think I have a special skill; the key is focusing my eyes on the right places. The amount of practice I've had and the conclusions I make – in other words, experience – are probably what enables me to work with the National Team and Olympic Team, but I can still tell you about the first things I look for.

Here are the first things I

ask myself when I watch butterfly technique:

### 1. Are these 3 things in sync? The hand/arm entry, head press, and 1st kick.

The arm recovery should swing forward and be dynamic. The hands should enter while: (1) the head presses forward, and (2) the hips come up at the end of the first kick. All of this should look like a forward attack on the water. If the hands enter too narrow (less than shoulder width) then they're likely not entering with enough forward motion.

Most common mistakes: the head is late, the arms enter downward, diving the forehead down.

Key phrase: "Kick the hands forward. Kick the chin and the chest forward."

### 2. Are there 2 kicks? Do the knees bend enough for the 2nd kick?

Even though you see the feet break the surface on every 2nd kick, it doesn't mean that the knees are bent enough to have the best 2nd kick. The knees have

to bend almost 90 degrees in order to have the optimal kick. It can be seen from above water with some effort, but best viewed from an underwater perspective.

### 3. Does head come up too early? When the pull starts, are the elbows and hands much wider than the shoulders?

It's very hard to see if someone has a good catch from above water, but you can think about these questions to help figure it out. The head should break the surface after the hands pass under the chest. If it comes up earlier, then arms might be pushing the body up instead of forward, resulting in a less effective catch. If the hands/elbows are too narrow, this is another clue that the catch could be better.

[Read More](#)



**"Because it's swim practice and working hard every day is what we do!"**



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Potomac Valley Swimming

Coaches Competition Meeting

will be on Monday, January 5th

at 7:00 p.m. at Overlee



## 5 Ways to get your Swimming Goals Back on Track

By *Olivier Poirier-Leroy*

No matter our best intentions and motivations, inevitably we will face droughts in our swimming. Whether it is a long bout of training becoming inexorably draining, out-of-the-pool stuff becoming a distraction, or a complete and utter loss of focus, it is natural to experience drops in motivation over the marathon that is a swim season.

Whether you are a baby-faced age-grouper or an international contender it happens to the best of us. The difference between those that are able to plow through with a minimal amount of loss of momentum and the swimmer who allows a short term drop in motivation to become a long term problem is that top performing swimmers don't allow those lapses to derail their broader goals. If you feel like you have let yourself down, or lost focus and direction, take a breath and relax. While ruts and hiccups are inevitable, they aren't fatal, and they certainly don't need to be permanent.

Here are 5 ways to get your focus and motivation back:

### **1. Reflect on what you want from your swimming.**

It can be easy to get lost in the routine of competitive swimming. You go to the pool, swim back and forth for ours on end, go to school, go back to the pool, then go home and promptly pass out. The following morning you wake up and do the same thing. Over and over again. The routine eventually starts to numb and wear you down until you

start to wonder what the point of it all is. It's precisely at moments like this that you need to sit down and revisit your goals.

### **2. Engage yourself by mixing up your goals.**

On Sunday night, as you think of the week to come, imagine what you want to improve in your swimming. It's not enough to just go to the pool and bang out the sets as is, you should be seeking to improve yourself within those sessions. For example, one week you could pay specific attention to your breakouts. Or vow to spend an extra ten minutes after practice working on your leg flexibility. Giving yourself these micro-goals will help you continue progressing towards that big, awesome goal at the end of the tunnel and keep you focused and engaged on your swimming. Additionally, when you complete those micro-goals, you get a little jolt of motivation that will compound as the weeks pile up and you see the accumulated improvement.

### **3. Focus on the things that will make the biggest difference.**

The surest recipe for failure is trying to do too much. Instead of doing a lot of things at half-pace and achieving half the results, pour all of your energy and focus into the things that will have the most impact on your swimming. What are the 3-4 things that will impact your swimming the most? Is it your mental game? Your nutrition habits? Breathing patterns?

Your turns? Seek out your "game changers" and hammer them into submission. **4. Make the most of what you have.**

One of the great characteristics of successful swimmers (and people!) is that they are able to squeeze the most out of whatever circumstances they are given. In university I trained at a pool that was treated with bromine. If you've never swam in a pool that is treated with bromine, consider yourself lucky. The first few times I caught a mouthful of pool water my whole body wretched. It tasted awful. But that was the hand I was dealt, and I vowed to make the best of it despite the nasty pool water.

### **5. Embrace your journey.**

Society is always forcing comparisons and standards on us. Commercials tell us that we should dress a certain way, look a certain way, be a certain way. This homogenous pressure robs us of something that is truly valuable – our individuality. This is no different with our goals and swimming journey. The path we take should be utterly and completely our own. Not your coaches, not your parents, not the swimmer in the lane next to you. Yours.

**"What you get by achieving your goals is not as important as what you become by achieving your goals."**

**- Goethe**