

Voulez-vous nager avec moi ce soir?

by Curtis Ready (our infamous Kinsmen swim coach)

So, do you want to swim faster next year? Of course, who doesn't? My question though is, do you *really* want to swim faster? The difference between the two questions is the difference between doing the same old thing you have done in the past compared to doing the things that are essential to improving your swim. If trying new things is not your thing then save your time and do not bother reading this article. If, on the other hand not swimming a personal best next summer will mean certain death, then sit down and prepare to be enlightened.

The first thing you have to do is start swimming now. Waiting until January or even worse May is not going to get it done. You should take a break following the race season but getting in the water now does not require you to start hammering out mile after mile. Quite the opposite, right now you should be doing low intensity and low mileage swimming focusing solely on your stroke. The hard swimming comes after you have put on 10 pounds over the Christmas break.

This brings me to my next point. Unless you are one of the 0.3792% of swimmers who can naturally learn proper swim technique on their own then you need to be swimming with a knowledgeable coach. As you cannot see your own technique while swimming, a coach's feedback is essential if you want to become more efficient in the water. Also, while swim coaches may resemble Greek gods, we are not miracle workers. One technical change takes anywhere from 6 to 8 weeks to become natural. Also, you can only work on one thing at a time unless you want to go mental. Therefore, the more problems you have, the longer a coach is going to need to get your stroke working properly.

A big limiting factor for many people hoping to improve their stroke is their lack of flexibility. Swimming, biking, and running (fill in this space) hours per week does not exactly help the average triathlete stay loose and limber. You should be stretching after every workout. If you know this is unrealistic then make an effort to stretch at least once a day in front of the television. Better yet, stretch six days a week and go to a yoga class on the other day. Yoga will not only force you to hold a stretch for more than 2 seconds but it will also help you "type-A" personalities chill out for an hour-and-a-half.

Finally, this time of year inevitably sees an annual pilgrimage of triathletes to the weight room. I will often be up in the weight room trying to add a few extra yards to my already Tiger-like drive and I will see Mr/Ms/Mrs Tri-geek pumping enough iron to make Arnold Schwarzenegger look like a wimp. Before you e-mail me with your objections I am not saying you should not lift weights. Having a balanced weight program is great for preventing injuries but getting stronger is unlikely to help you swim faster next summer. For instance, when I was 18 and swimming competitively there was a 13-year old girl in my group who broke 18:30 for the 1500m free. Whether or not she was faster than me is not the point. The point is that a 13-year old girl is obviously not going to be overly strong. Instead, she swam remarkably fast by having a great stroke, wonderful flexibility and tremendous fitness. Imagine that...

Happy Swimming.