



Love to Swim School

Tri Training...How and Why

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For many triathletes, the swimming leg of a triathlon is the hardest, weakest part of their race. The leap from running to biking, or biking to running seems natural enough for most land animals, but swimming is a different animal altogether. Most make the leap with no formal swimming lessons. They are “self-taught”. Many underestimate the physical demands made on the body by swimming. A 2:30 marathoner does not necessarily have the skills or physical ability to swim a mile, or even 50 yards. People, once wet, are often surprised by the physical challenge of swimming. In fact, the hand-eye coordination crowd has disrespected swimming as a sport for years. Many moms and dads would rather see Johnny play a “real” sport like football than see him swim competitively. If only they understood how technical and challenging swimming actually is.

The point is you know the challenges of swimming. And I know you know because I have seen you trudge up the boat ramp at the end of the leg, or rest on every wall of that 400, struggling to finish and move on to what you're really good at. I won't lie and tell you I haven't been tempted to stand at water's edge and hand out my business cards as people emerged from what was positively painful to watch, let alone accomplish.

As a 30-year swimming veteran, this is my advice to all those triathletes who struggle to get through the swimming legs and to those triathlete wannabe's who just can't get past the water part:

1. Work on technique during the off-season. This is not to say that you shouldn't work on technique during the season. But I do believe that if you are trying to change your stroke, then you need to avoid swimming it and focus on the drills that will improve your specific technical problems. Which brings us to the next point...
2. Get lessons or a coach. And I don't mean the guy in the next lane. Professional coaching once a week can make a world of difference in your understanding of swimming and your swimming ability. There are Masters programs at North East and Northside Aquatics Centers as well as adult swimming education programs like mine and triathlete training programs like Shelly O'Brien's.
3. The most important fundamental things to learn in a beginning swimming program are breathing and balance. Breathing should be rhythmic and body balance should be log-like.
4. Don't just swim long distance junk yardage. If you are a runner, you know that endurance is built with speedwork as well as long runs. Swimming short, fast repeats perfectly with lots of rest will push that aerobic envelope faster than just swimming lots of yards. Do both.