



Future Dreams

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We're all guilty of it. Someone or something gets us excited, and our motivation levels go sky high. We set goals, we plan out our training program, and then get stuck in. The problem is, we usually get so stuck in that we blow ourselves up within a very short time. And then, all of a sudden, we find ourselves heading down the opposite track – stagnating results, a lack of motivation, and that familiar desire of wanting to throw the towel in – “Hey, there's always next year...”

There's a smarter way to train than this, and it guarantees results as well. Even though most of us are aware of, and even profess to utilize it, there are in fact very few athletes who do put this training methodology into practice properly.

The training principle I am talking of is progressions.

THE GOAL OF PROGRAMMING

The obvious aim of any program should be to lower your current best times for the event distance you have earmarked to compete in, for example, a faster 1500m or 3.8k swim time. But we should also state that any good program should aim to KEEP you progressing through the ENTIRE season without that familiar plateau. I'm sure we've all been there with little idea of how to progress further.

With swimming, there are 3 factors that we can juggle week-by-week that will bring about progressions during our training. The basic rule of thumb is – when you increase one or all of these factors gradually over time then you will improve. It's that simple.

These factors are...

1. Volume
2. Intensity
3. Method or Technique

So, all you need to make certain of is that one or more of these factors is in fact continually changing. And if you can keep gradually improving, week upon week, for the season's duration, then your results will go from strength to strength.

SPEED OF ADAPTATION

Our bodies tend to adapt only so quickly. Due to this it is generally more



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sensible to let them do just that, which assumes that we begin at low levels of intensity and volume. As the season begins, for many of us, anything you do is going to have a positive effect on your fitness, especially for those who do not stick to a structured training plan over winter. So, by starting easily, as the season moves on it should be very easy to increase training volumes &/or intensities because you didn't hit your limits in the first month. This is also a good injury prevention strategy – your body has ample time to slowly build necessary support structures as you gradually get fit.

To improve swimming times, you are going to require neuromuscular adaptation that will only occur if two main factors are correctly put together in training; long miles, of technical correct movements (that are constantly improved). Especially over the wintertime, your intensity can be pulled right back - you do not have to be anaerobically fit when not racing. But, if you can get used to throwing in progressively longer easy workouts that also continue to improve technically, then you'll soon find that not only will you start moving faster but you'll be doing it far easier than normal. Then, when summer comes around again, any threshold workouts or speed work will really put the icing on the cake. You'll also enjoy the change in intensity more as well. One of the real beauties of this training approach is that your weekly progressions need not be outside your comfort zone. In other words you should feel mentally in control of and enjoy most sessions, but still bring about progressive changes in your body. You need to plan the months so that your body always has a new adaptation in a challenging direction thrown at it approximately once every 3-4 weeks. This continual change in your programming will continue to generate a stronger, fitter, and more technically competent vehicle in which to compete.

One of the important reasons why this approach works so well with a discipline such as swimming is that even if you hold your intensity and volume at the same levels for 4 weeks and yet consistently improve your technique, then your progress will continue forwards. As a comparison with another discipline like cycling, you may find that unless you keep increasing one of either volume or intensity (and recover, I must add) then you can reach a plateau quickly. This need not happen in swimming given that the technical element is constantly evolving. So, this should serve to highlight the importance of a constant technical focus in swimming, even to the point where it overshadows your intensity levels. It is still very possible to undercook yourself in the pool, but by lifting your volume gradually AND improving the ease of, fluency of propulsion and length of each stroke, then you will continue to improve. Easier said than done though, I know.

A PROCESS

It really is important to understand, then learn to trust, that technical progressions and speed improvements will occur as a PROCESS, not as an instant realization from one or two sessions. This is why consistency is just so important. By persevering with the technical fundamentals, while regularly changing the methods you choose to work on them, you will guarantee



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improvements. But, on the other hand, if you are one of those athletes who likes to be a rock star in random sessions and then train erratically for the rest of the month, you'll just find yourself racing erratically and probably suffering from injuries. The best athletes are good for the simple reason that they succeed in making continual, improvements regularly over time - they just keep making changes for LONGER where other athletes may merely get stale. They do not allow themselves to become familiar with the status quo.

It is therefore crucial that you change your training habits regularly to ensure that the progressions will allow your body to continually adapt, but do it easily and over time.

Key Ideas

- » Consistency
- » It's not a one-day thing - not about those single rock-star sessions
- » Aim to improve something every week (volume, intensity, & technique)
- » Plateaus are a signal of stalled adaptation (lack of progressions)

So the summary of all this is...

Have a plan that combines progressions, which are focused on the goals that you want to achieve. But also make sure that you'll get a kick out of training - those training changes have got to motivate, inspire and keep you interested. Then you'll find it easy to stick to the plan and in the process you'll allow the changes to come. You can't become world champ in a single session, but by going too hard or too long, you can destroy your progress for the following week.

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