

HOBART MASTERS SWIMMING CLUB SKILLS AND DRILLS NOTES

RACE ROUTINE (swimming is a thinking sport)

In the 24 hours before race day

- Rest. Avoid any unusual physical activity that might cause an injury.
- Eat healthily. Avoid spicy and fatty food, and food from a dodgy source.
- Limit alcohol.
- Hydrate with water.
- Sleep well.
- Eat a normal breakfast.
- Have a coffee or tea and eat a small pre-race snack if needed.

At the pool

Warm up swim. You need to do a general warm up swim to activate your system, plus a race-specific component. Rehearse bits of the race – race speed, start and turns. Activate your racing system. Let it know it is going to be put under race load. Don't surprise your system by starting your event cold/without some form of rehearsal. Promote blood flow to the muscle groups you are going to be using (especially shoulders and legs), get your heart pumping and your breath elevated for a short period during your warm up.

Have a pre-race warm up routine and stick to it. Do what you need to do.

- **How much time before you swim?** Start about 40 mins before and finish at least 20 mins before your first event. If you have a longer wait then do a bit more. During the meet do mini warm up swims and mini swim down swims.
- **How much to do?** About 1000m to 1200m for the first warm up then about half that for mini warm ups. Swim down until you feel completely recovered.
- **What to do in between events?** Relax and think about something other than your next event. Do some timekeeping, chat, laugh, go for a walk, and stay warm. Don't just sit and watch other people swimming.
- **What to think about?** Do not think about your results! Think about your technique and mentally rehearse aspects of the race, including the start, controlling your pace, executing efficient and effective turns, holding your pace, not giving in to initial pain or discomfort signals, and finishing full of energy.
- **How to relax?** Lie down (remember, you swim lying down), lie down with your feet elevated to promote blood flow to your upper body, read something engrossing, talk about anything but swimming. Meditate or at least practice breathing to a regular, slow in/out count of about 6 to 8. Do some gentle, long stretches but do not over-extend your muscles. Massage any muscles that are a bit sore or prone to cramping.
- **What to eat and drink?** Your primary sources of energy when swimming are glycogen (extracted from carbohydrates and stored in your muscles and liver) and oxygen. Limit your food and liquid intake during race day at the pool as they will have minimal real effect on your swimming system on the day. They might have a positive placebo effect (e.g. jellybeans and snakes) but also might compromise your tummy and your readiness to perform well if you overdo it. The important food and liquid is what you consume in the 24 hours before the event.

Have enough but not too much. Energy food such as fruit (bananas) and other complex carbohydrates are useful to top up your glycogen level, but more is not better. Water is generally regarded as the best liquid to have in your system to avoid dehydration. Sports drinks may upset your digestion and not sit well when you are putting in extra effort, so use them in moderation (they may deliver a placebo effect for you). If you tend to get nervous pre-race, you may experience an elevated feeling of thirst (in this situation a dry mouth is a psychological response to stress rather than a genuine indicator of impending dehydration) and decreased hunger. If this is the case, recognise it, control your fluid intake and maybe nibble on something like a muesli bar to help settle your butterflies.

Race preparation, execution and post-race

Go through your race routine (pre-swim, during the swim and post swim).

- Get behind the blocks in plenty of time – do not feel rushed.
- Mentally rehearse the start including your key skills – launch off the block (forward but slightly downward – no belly flops), head position between your arms, body streamlined, depth into the water, distance underwater, transition to first strokes, then stroking (using your easy speed to settle into the swim).
- Make sure your cap and goggles are securely in place before getting onto the blocks or into the water for backstrokers. Goggles need to be clean, defogged and tight.
- Know what your preferred block position is, go to it, take a deep breath or two, listen for the start signal, and react through your legs. It is the big muscles in your legs that get you off to a fast start. (Tip – you can develop strength in your legs by doing half squats, leg presses at the gym, cycling uphill and doing regular spin sessions. Leg strength will also improve your turns.)
- Transition to swimming and control your pace to suit the event. Check your stroke technique. Are you kicking? Are you rushing your stroke or going for length? Are you breathing in your preferred breathing pattern?
- Mentally prepare for the turn coming up. Execute it as you have practised it, into the wall and out again. Go for distance off the wall, with a smooth transition back to stroking. Do not be distracted by what other swimmers are doing. They are swimming their race not yours.
- Focus on finishing fast, and go for it at the time of your choosing.
- After the swim, ask yourself what you did well (and therefore need to continue to do as well if not even better) and what you think you can improve upon. Listen to feedback from others and trust your own assessment. These are the things that you can commit to working on in preparation for improvement next time. Just looking at your time and telling yourself it was good/average/bad without any analysis of what you actually did well or not so well is not helpful. Simplistic thoughts like 'I did not go as fast as I had hoped' are not helpful; they are useless unless you understand the underlying causes, and do something about them. Review everything, including the 24 hours before race day, race day preparations and race performance. Make notes so you have something to review in the future.

Remember, swimming is a thinking sport.

Prepared by Philip Tyrell for Hobart Masters Swimming Club

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