

SwimNorthWest Masters Development Day.

Sunday 28th February 2016 Manchester

Having attended my first Masters Development Day, unsure of what it would involve, I came away eager to put the messages into practice. If I ever needed convincing, I'm now certain that you can teach an old dog new tricks! The day was aimed at *Competitive Masters Swimmers and coaches of all abilities looking to improve technique and get the most from their training*. It included dry side instruction seminars and practical coaching sessions in the pool. Whilst most of the content would be equally relevant to any Masters gala there was an emphasis placed on preparation for the European championships in May.

It was a full day starting at 9:30 with a packed agenda leading to a 16:30 finish. Judy, Billy and I from Warrington Masters attended along with 17 other swimmers and 5 coaches from clubs across the North West. The range of ages from early 20's to 70's and varied competitive experience and ability, contributed to making the day such a good one and nobody felt out of their depth in either the class room or the pool.

The day was facilitated by Jeroen Peters from SwimNorthWest who did an excellent job in putting the day together and making sure we kept to time. The morning class room sessions were held in the Sugden Sports Centre which is only a short distance from the Aquatics Centre.

Session 1: **Strength, conditioning and how to cope with ageing**. This session was led by Martyn Matthews, Senior Lecture Salford University. We spent the first part of the session depressing ourselves as Martyn led a discussion on the issues facing masters athletes as they get older. Basically after reaching 30 it's all downhill! I am not going to go through the science here however the following link will tell you all you need to know..... http://www.coach.ca/files/Coaching_Master_Athletes_FINAL_EN.pdf.

That said there is a lot we can do, actively, as we age. One of the main issues for athletes getting older is loss of muscle mass which also plays a contributory part in other issues e.g. loss of power, injury / recovery, fast twitch / slow twitch muscle fibre make up.



Martyn only had 1½ hours to cover a massive agenda and whilst it might have been easy to get lost in the 'science' there were great explanations and examples to take away. He discussed the benefits of HIIT (High Intensity Interval Training) having a positive impact on depletion of testosterone levels with age. The key is in the title 'intensity' therefore it is important to ensure you recover. He went on to explain VO2 max and the difference between anaerobic and aerobic exercise, how with anaerobic exercise you burn more glucose however it does create lactic acid. The two main messages Martyn talked about were firstly; quality not quantity, simply doing high mileage be it in running, swimming etc. would have a negative impact on fitness and secondly there are huge benefits of strength training to maintain muscle mass. Obviously in-experienced people can't start to lift heavy weights however after a period of acclimatisation you can move on to Hypertrophy-Specific Training which simply means stimulating muscle growth by loading the muscles (heavier weights lower reps). Martyn

wasn't advocating that we all need to go to the gym and start humping massive weights however academic research does demonstrate that strength conditioning can both support people generally as they age as well as supporting masters athlete development.

Session 2: **Psychology of competition and racing. How to prepare for Europeans London 2016.** Dr Karen Howells CTC Healthcare led this session. In addition to her academic credentials Karen is also the sports psychologist for Loughborough University Swim Team, a swim coach and a masters swimmer herself (she is competing in London).



"It's up to you, either synch or swim."

The session started by looking at the difference between intrinsic motivation (engaging in behaviour because it is personally rewarding essentially, performing an activity for its own sake rather than the desire for some external reward) and extrinsic motivation (when we are motivated to perform a behaviour or engage in an activity to earn a reward or avoid a punishment). We talked about the different drivers for masters swimmers and what makes us do it.

We went on to discuss more basic psychological concepts such as fight or flight, Cognitive anxiety, psychological skills training. Whilst most people had covered these concepts at different times it was interesting to look at them from a swimming perspective. I'm sure you don't want to read some academic paper on this so suffice to say the main message to focus on is control what you can control and not to be distracted by the things out of your control.

The session went on to look at goal setting at three levels;

- Outcome goals: Winning
- Performance goals: Times / PB
- Process goals: Skills

Whilst we are generally quite good at the first two levels we are not very good at setting ourselves process goals e.g. setting goals for what we want to achieve in every training set.

The final part of the session looked at imagery (no pun intended) and how it could help in preparing for a number of situations e.g. recuperating from injury, building confidence and developing skills. We went on to discuss basic preparation for the Europeans that could impact on your performance e.g. getting there, warm up, availability of lockers, how you are going to feel on the day (you are going to be nervous, so write heat No and lane No on your hand so you don't forget!).

The highlight of the session was when Karen, in making a point about what is the worst thing that could happen said no one had ever died racing / training in a pool. At which point Billy informed her that actually he had for a number of minutes and had to rely on a defibrillator to get him going again! Everyone fell about after this and I'm sure Karen will be using this anecdote in lectures for years to come.

After lunch we had a short walk over to the Aquatics Centre for the pool session which was led by James Stannard (Swim Trafford Head Performance Coach). We were split into four lanes with four swimmers in each lane. After a short warm up we were divided into two groups; one focusing on butterfly the other on backstroke. We had about 30 minutes

focusing on drills / technique under James's (and the other coaches) watchful eye. After 30 minutes we changed strokes, one group focusing on breaststroke and one on freestyle again focusing on drills and technique.

Following these two sessions we went on to cover racing starts and turn practice. We were able to use the blocks (including the ones with the sliding back board) and the size of the group meant we had plenty of time for practice and to be given pointers on how to improve our technique.

In conclusion I thought the session was great value for money (£15 well spent). Whilst there was some focus upon the European Masters, the key messages are equally applicable to all masters events / training. I personally got a lot out of the sessions, however I do recognise that more experienced competitors may not have got as much out of it. That said we can all benefit to some degree from constructive feedback on technique etc. which is something we don't always have much time for generally in training and the reminders of how to adapt our training as we age are always useful. The split between classroom and pool worked well and I would certainly recommend future development days.

Steve Connor