

Heyo!

We've all had a Sammy Save-Up in our midst.

We will be working through an hour-long main set, and Lil Sammy will be trailing along at the back of the lane. On the last couple reps they "suddenly" discover a well of energy and effort that manifests in a blinding, near-PB effort on the final couple reps, usually to the chagrin of the other swimmers in the lane.

This swimmer is the most egregious example of a swimmer who puts all their effort in reserve until the finish line is in sight.

And while it's easy to poke fun at the Sammy Save-Ups in our chlorinated midst, there is a degree of universality to what they are doing. Because we all do this in varying amounts in our own workouts.

After all...

Rarely do you meet a swimmer who literally leaves it all in the pool at the end of a workout.

We hedge our effort and energy in what we think it will take to complete the practice without dying. The problem is that in our efforts to forecast how much energy we need we end up holding back. And more critically, **we aren't nearly as accurate as we believe when it comes to guesstimating how much energy is required to complete the workout.**

The problem with this kind of training is that we never really push ourselves.

In a study of elite cyclists (Swart 2009), researchers had them do a series of 40km time trials. The more certainty there was with the endpoint, the more aggressive the cyclists were with their effort, resulting in a faster performance and even a decreased rate of perceived effort.

When we see the end we work harder and with seemingly less effort.

Here are some things your swimmers can do to combat the natural instinct to ease off when a full effort is called for:

1. Keeping a training journal.

The self-awareness that comes from using a training log can be priceless. It helps develop a level of self-awareness with swimmers, showing them with written proof of the moments where they mastered a tough set or workout.

Used properly, a training log shows swimmers that how they feel at the beginning of a workout and how they end up doing are rarely the same.

2. Make a policy of pushing limits.

The most effective form of confidence is experience. You can read countless listicles and tips on how to build confidence and mental toughness until you are blue in the face, but until you do something that confidence is shaky at best.

What's something you can do today that you've never done before?

It doesn't need to be PB-shattering; these things can be simple and "easy". Breathing to your off-side. Adding a dolphin kick to all your walls. Staying after practice and stretching and foam rolling for 15 minutes.

3. Have self-talk for those moments.

Planning and writing out self-talk or performance cues lined up for *that* moment is critical. Something short and simple to help push you through the discomfort.

The only way to avoid the moment where you die in training and competition is to always pull your punches. And you can guess how much improvement you are leaving on the table if you are perpetually not taking things to the max in the water.

4. Focus on one rep at a time.

Over the years I have leaned on about a dozen different strategies to push through hard sets and races.

Hands down the most common one was the "multiple ends" strategy: focusing exclusively on the end of this rep or lap. Repeat for the next lap or rep until completion.

5. Remember that easing off is usually a subconscious decision.

Simply knowing that easing off the gas when we start thinking big picture about the workout or set is natural is the first step.

It's a normal reaction to ease off the gas when we think big picture with our workouts (and our long term goals, come to think of it). Emphasize an awareness of this in your training so that it doesn't catch you off-guard when it

happens.

6. Write the workout one set at a time.

It's always interesting to see how coaches lay out their workouts. From personal experience most will write the whole thing on the board, from warm-up to warm-down. Others will write one set at a time.

Play around with both to see which elicits a bigger effort from your swimmers.

7. Play around with the positioning of the main set.

Similarly, play around with where you put your most intensity-loaded sets. You might get a better effort when your swimmers are fresh at the beginning of the practice, but it's possible that your athletes will unleash their best efforts when the end of practice is creeping up.

Try out some of these tips, and let me know how it goes with your athletes.

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