



GOLDMINDS
BY WAYNE GOLDSMITH

RELAX...IT'S ONLY SWIMMING

Stressed? Tense? Anxious? Not to worry...just...relax!



[PHOTO BY MATT RUBEL OF RUBEL PHOTOGRAPHY]

WHY is relaxation so important?

Because...

- *Tension is the enemy of performance.*
- *Speed is important—it's what everyone is training for: the sport is about speed!*

However, at the very heart of speed...is relaxation. Quite simply, the faster you want to go, the more relaxed you need to be:

- *Swimming faster is not about trying harder: you can't force swimming speed.*
- *It's not about "effort": swimming fast should look and feel effortless.*
- *It's not about holding your breath, gritting your teeth and being aggressive: swimming fast is all about breathing deeply in and out, slowly and completely, without any facial tension...and staying calm at high speed.*

The concepts of speed and relaxation are connected. They should be developed in tandem to help swimmers realize their full performance potential.

THE SPEED AND RELAXATION MATRIX

There are four basic types of swimmers when it comes to how they combine speed and relaxation:

- *Low speed/low relaxation swimmers*
- *High speed/low relaxation swimmers*
- *Low speed/high relaxation swimmers*
- *High speed/high relaxation swimmers.*

The goal for swimmers should be to learn how to swim as fast as possible with the least amount of effort...and to stay smooth and relaxed at high speed during competition.

If you consider speed and relaxation as connected, it helps to explain how and why some swimmers are able to swim fast and race well in meets while others are not.

Swimmers who lack speed and who don't relax in the water find it difficult to compete at any level of the sport. They need to focus on building the basic skills



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and techniques of swimming and progressively improve their ability to move through water efficiently and effectively.

Swimmers with great natural speed who do not understand the importance of relaxation can usually win short sprint races and often appear to possess the talent necessary to be successful. However, without mastering the art of relaxation, their natural speed overly fatigues them, and they lack the capacity to finish strongly at the end of their events.

Swimmers who have learned how to relax in the water, but who haven't quite developed the speed to compete to their potential should be looking at the way they train for speed. Sometimes swimmers who develop a high capacity to relax, but who lack the speed they need to race well in competition, have been training in programs with a strong emphasis on long, slow, middle- and long-distance training. As a result, they look and feel comfortable in the water, but lack the real speed to race successfully over 50- and 100-meter events.

The ultimate goal for coaches and swimmers should be to develop the capacity to swim at maximum speed through their full race distance. This capacity demands the concurrent development of both speed and relaxation: effortless excellence!

10 BENEFITS OF LEARNING TO RELAX

Learning to relax...

1. Keeps you calm, composed and confident
2. Stops you from wasting energy and effort by worrying about things that don't matter
3. Prevents you from using too much energy when preparing for a race
4. Helps keep you relaxed, rested and ready for the right moment
5. Means you can swim your race in the pool and not in the locker room
6. Helps you to learn faster...which can help you swim faster
7. Helps you develop better "feel" for the water...which means you can improve your stroke technique
8. Helps you to swim for longer periods of time because you're only using the muscles and the energy you actually need to use...and nothing more
9. Improves your kick...because instead of pointing your toes and rigidly kicking your legs, you can learn to kick with smooth, easy, flowing movements
10. Helps you to swim faster!

AN EASY WAY TO REMEMBER THE IMPORTANCE OF RELAXATION

Think of relaxation this way—R.E.L.A.X.E.D:

- **Relax**—it's only swimming. There's no reason to be worried, stressed, tight or tense.
- **Easy**—swimming should be easy and effortless.
- **Learning**—everyone learns faster when they're relaxed. Learn more...learn it sooner...swim faster.
- **Attitude**—relaxation begins and ends with you. If you think of swimming as being "hard" or about "trying" and about "effort," it'll be difficult to relax. On the other hand, if you think of swimming as being "easy, effortless, smooth and soft," you can—and you will—

relax...and you'll swim faster than ever.

• **Xtra-ordinary**—It's what you'll become once you learn to stay relaxed!

• **Every day**—Practice relaxation in everything you do...every day. Relaxation can become a habit—a state of mind that can help you achieve success in everything you do. Sometimes it's as simple as stopping and thinking, "RELAX!" Breathe in as you think and say, "RE," and breathe out as you think and say "LAX." A few of these RE-LAXes...and you'll be as cool as a cucumber in a snowstorm!

• **DON'T** stress about stress! You are not your feelings! You are so much more than your thoughts. It's normal and natural to feel a little stressed and anxious—it happens to everyone...even to the greatest and most talented swimmers. Whenever you feel a little tight and tense, breathe deeply and slowly—four seconds to breathe in, four seconds to breathe out slowly and four seconds of peace when you just say the word, "RELAX." Within a few moments, you'll feel cool, calm and confident...and totally relaxed and ready to race. ❖

Wayne Goldsmith has worked with swimmers, coaches, swimming clubs, swimming parents, sports scientists and swimming organizations all over the world for more than 25 years. He has contributed to Swimming World Magazine for 16 years. He is one of the world's leading experts in elite-level swimming and high-performance sport. Be sure to check out Goldsmith's websites at www.wgaquatics.com and www.wgcoaching.com.

SUMMARY

1. When swimmers and coaches think about and talk about swimming, quite often they use words such as "fast" and "powerful" and "skills." Yet, words such as "relax" and "smooth" and "easy" are just as important and potentially just as influential on swimming performance.

2. Swimmers and coaches should try to connect "mind and body"—for every physical action, there's a corresponding mental action! Want to go fast? Stay relaxed. Want to swim powerfully? Keep it smooth. Want to be brilliant? Stay focused on skills.

3. Being more relaxed in and out of the water will help you perform to your potential when it really matters. And for those other times—such as school, work and other areas of life when it's important to stay cool, calm, composed and collected—learning to relax is an important skill that that will ensure you are at your best in critical and important situations.