

Approaching a Race

Australian distance ace Kieren Perkins was one of my idols as a young age grouper.

He had an aggressive approach to racing the 1500m freestyle.

Which could be summarized as:

Dive in and get after it.

The speed, skill, and grit were developed methodically in training with his longtime coach, Doug Carew, who noted that Perkins wasn't spectacularly talented or gifted in the water.

"He's not a freak," said Carew. "We just worked the program. We built the speed. We built the technique."

This methodical approach to excellence was apparent in Perkins' race day mindset, too.

At the Atlanta Olympics in 1996, Perkins was the defending Olympic champion and world record holder in the 1500m freestyle.

But he'd also struggled that week, making the final of his best event by just two-one-hundredths of a second, giving him lane eight for the final.

In the moments before the race, sitting in a chair behind the block, taking deep breaths and thousand-yard-staring down the length of the pool in Atlanta:

"It's all inwards stuff on what we have got to do," said Perkins, reflecting on that moment. "I've never been a big 'Oh, I must get out and kill these guys.' It's more, I've got to get out on the first 50 and do this, make sure my turns are right, and do the job that I've got to do."

Swimmers often get so caught up in what they want to achieve in the pool, and what may/may not happen.

Instead:

Set a goal.

Build a process.

And then work that process like it owes you money.

The results, times, and gold medals will take care of themselves.

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