

BACK FROM YOUR BREAK

BY WAYNE GOLDSMITH

Now that you've had your holiday break from swimming, you can return from that break and become better than ever! It's time to start the way you want to finish!

Did you have a nice holiday break from swimming? Really? You had some rest time? Went skiing? Had a great holiday? Hung out with friends and family?

That's great.

Well, now it's time to get back in the pool and start training for those big meets coming up soon.

The message of this article is very clear: *start the way you want to finish!*

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Many swimmers take a break, enjoy some "down time," and come back with a "build-up" mentality:

"During the first weeks back in the water, I will take it easy, then build up gradually until it's time to get serious about racing again a few months later."

The problem with that kind of thinking is that the early stages of training are your foundation—they are the "rock" on which you build a successful swimming season.

If your first weeks back in training are **S.L.O.W.** (i.e., Sloppy technique, Lazy skills, Ordinary fitness and a Woeful attitude), then chances are your meet performances will also be **SLOW!**

So, how do you the start the way you want to finish?

1. DECIDE THAT YOUR FIRST LAP = YOUR LAST LAP

First of all, forget the "build-up" mentality. *The most important session of the season is the first one.* This is when and where you decide what type of season you will have. You can make it happen by sustaining high standards of excellence in every aspect of your training.

2. TRAIN THE WAY YOU WANT TO RACE

This advice may be an "oldie," but it's also a "goodie"—and still as important as ever.

You can't pass a math exam by studying history. You can't get better at lifting heavy weights unless you learn how to lift heavy weights.

You can't show up at a swim meet and expect to swim fast under pressure in race conditions unless you train every day to swim fast under pressure in race conditions. Don't be afraid to throw in a few sprints in the first session—and make sure they include a race-quality dive, turn and finish.

3. SET LITTLE GOALS EVERY SESSION

Start every session—particularly your first ses-

ion after your break—with these two words: "I will...."

For example:

- "I will drive into and out of every turn at race pace and with great technique."
- "I will kick with power, speed and strength in all of my kicking repeats."
- "I will never breathe inside the flags when finishing in freestyle and butterfly."

An attitude of "I will" quickly becomes an ability of "I can," and the end result is being able to say, "I did," after you perform brilliantly at your next meet.

4. CHALLENGE YOURSELF EVERY SESSION

Being better means doing things you have never done before. Improvement means change. So, to swim faster and improve, you have to be prepared to challenge yourself to do things differently.

It is crazy to do the same things you have always done and expect a *different* result. Another way of saying this is, "If you do what you always did, you will get what you always got!"

Strive to do one thing—just *one thing* in each session that pushes you to and beyond your limits. Do one "impossible" thing every day, and soon nothing will be impossible.

5. TAKE SOMEONE—OR A FEW "SOMEONES" ALONG FOR THE RIDE

Every journey is easier and more fun with a traveling companion. Talk with a teammate about what you want to do this season and about your dreams of making every session a great session. Ask them to come along for the ride.

Imagine having someone in your lane or the next lane to encourage you, support you, pick you up when you are feeling down and to push you to your limits every session—someone who not only understands what you are trying to do, but who wants to help you do it.

6. GET YOUR COACH AS EXCITED AND COMMITTED AS YOU ARE

...and tell your coach about your "start-the-way-you-want-to-finish" approach. Your coach can help you more than you realize. Saying to the coach, "I really want to make a success of this season and start the way I want to finish," gives your coach three clear messages:

- "Please help me to keep working hard even when I am a little tired and flat."
- "Please ask more of me than you have in the past, and help me to overcome any physical, technical and mental barriers that may have gotten in the way of my previous swimming performances."
- "Please give me some extra things to work on in my fitness, speed, technique, skills and gym work."

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7. DO NOT COMPROMISE!

Sometime in that first session back after the break, your mind may wander and start thinking, “What am I doing? I have plenty of time. Why am I giving it my best now when there are weeks to go before my first meet?”

Do not compromise! Fight these negative thoughts—*start the way you want to finish!* Everyone has negative thoughts, but the trick is to say “no” to the negative. As soon as one of those negative notions pops into your head, say a loud, confident, strong, determined “NO” to that negativity.

8. EVERY SESSION IS IMPORTANT

It is really tempting at the beginning of the season to think, “It will be OK. I will take it easy for a few sessions, back off now and then, and I will still be able to swim fast when it matters.”

Wrong!

Every session is important. Swimming fast is a habit. It comes from consistently practicing great skills, technique and fitness every day so that you do things automatically on race day.

When swimmers are tired and under pressure, they revert to doing things that feel the most natural—the things they do in training every day.

So, if you regularly allow yourself to execute sloppy turns, lazy skills, ordinary fitness and a woeful attitude (*aka* S.L.O.W.) in training, your mind and body will be SLOW when you are faced with the pressure of racing!

9. BE ENGAGED IN WHAT YOU DO

Just showing up for training is not the answer. Rather, the answer is showing up for training and giving everything the best you have to offer.

The difference between good swimmers and great ones is not the quantity of training they do—it’s their commitment to excellence and the consistent quality of their training that makes the difference.

The old saying, “Half the secret to success is just showing up” does not apply to swimmers! Not only do you have to show up, but then you must give it all you’ve got!

10. TRAIN LIKE, ACT LIKE AND THINK LIKE THE SWIMMER YOU WANT TO BE

Imagine the “future you”:

- The swimmer who will be on the blocks at the high school or college championships...or state titles... or even nationals at the end of the season;
- The “you” with great fitness, skills, technique and speed;
- The “you” with a strong, unbreakable, “bullet-proof” confidence and self-belief.

See yourself as you will be at the end of the season when it will all come together, and you will be at your peak.

SUMMARY

1. Start the way you want to finish!
2. Come back from your holiday break more passionate, more determined and more focused than ever. Your break helped provide the 3 “E’s”: Energy, Enthusiasm and Excitement. Now, make the most of your break as you return to the pool!
3. Be the swimmer you want to be tomorrow...*today!*

Be that swimmer NOW!

The trick to becoming the swimmer you want to be is to *train, act and think* like that swimmer from the start—yes, right now...from your very first session back in the water after your break from swimming! ♦

Wayne Goldsmith is one of the world’s leading experts in elite-level swimming and high-performance sport. Be sure to visit his website at www.sportscoachingbrain.com.

[PHOTO BY MICHAEL ARCON]

PICTURED » Be the swimmer you want to be tomorrow...TODAY!