

TOP TIP #5

Aim for excellence, not perfection.

Swimming - while a gross motor skill sport - is a sport that requires attention to detail - whether it is mastering your head position during fly, or timing your backstroke turns just right, or calculating your splits for the mile. Many swim races are decided in the hundredths of a second, emphasizing the need for “perfection” even further.

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS:

Perfection:

Perfection is a flawless state where everything is exactly right. It can also be the action of making something perfect, creating a condition where everything is 100% great.

Excellence:

Excellence is the quality of excelling, being the best at something. Excellence is not a flawless state, but rather something that is characterized by good qualities in high degree.

To help you maintain a balance in your athletic performance see-saw base triangle (See TOP TIP 1), science has found that striving for excellence rather than perfection is likely to help achieve desired outcomes. More specifically, athletes who strive for excellence can accept that mistakes are inevitable, value what they can learn from them, and don't let mistakes define them as individuals. On the other hand, athletes who strive for perfection tend to see mistakes as evidence of their own inadequacy or inferiority, and often results in maladaptive feelings of stress, anxiety, depression. Focusing on perfection - which by definition can rarely be achieved - can also lead to avoidant behaviors and overall poor mental and physical health and wellbeing.

“Having outcome expectations are like an extra weighted vest on your shoulders. Indeed, expectations are not real, they are imaginary”

- Kobe Bryant



SCIENCE FACT:

While perfection is not inherently bad, it can become problematic when the drive and unrealistic expectations to be the best becomes based on fear, and starts eating up your self-confidence, identity, and impact your life and relationships.

Critical Questions:

By focusing on redefining success (See TOP TIP #2), you can shift your thinking away from perfection to excellence. Below you will find some statements about excellence and perfection. Which ones resonate with you? Are there any others you find inspiring or impactful?

- *Excellence inspires, perfection ridicules.*
- *Excellence is calm, perfection is stiff.*
- *Perfection is not real. There is always room for improvement.*
- *Excellence liberates, perfection subjugates.*
- *At times, excellence can be achieved with 80% effort.*

