

TOP TIP #2

Swimming is a sport where you train hard for six months to be great for three days.

You all know from experience that swimming is a sport where performance improvements - when measured in time drops - typically become smaller as you age. Indeed, competitive swimming training consists of various focus areas, and it is not uncommon to add time in a swim meet that takes place after a hard training cycle and a successful taper meet.

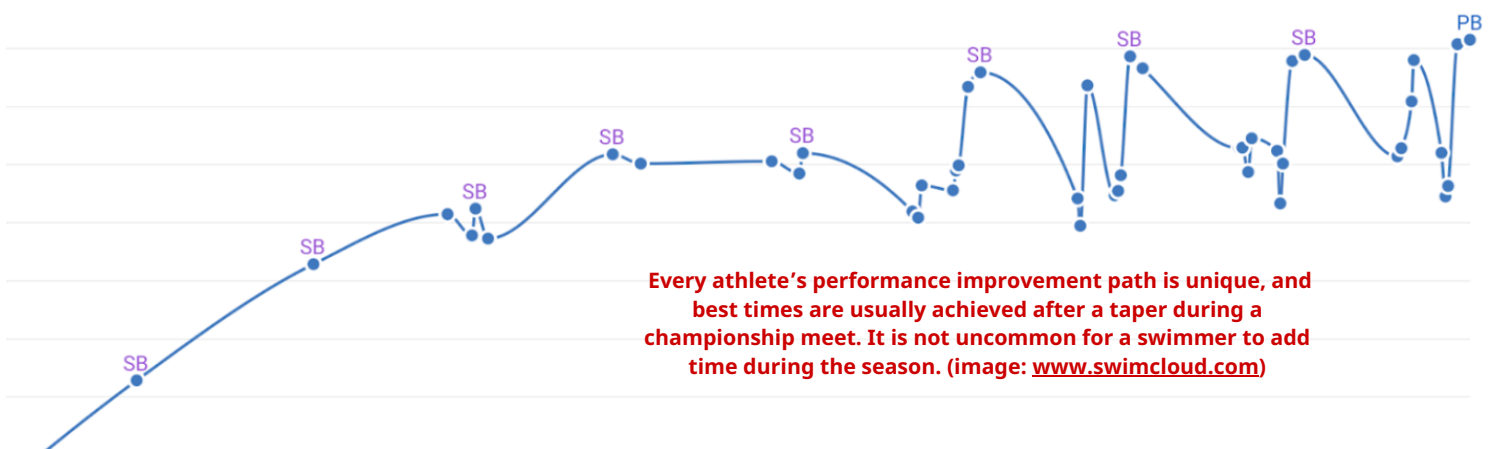
When approaching championship meets, competitive swimmers typically start to taper, where they combine the “art and science” of swimming. The goal of taper is to prepare the body and the mind to produce peak performance when it matters the most.

Sport science supports the fact that taper has a better chance of success IF the swimmer has trained consistently, and systematically all season. In other words, when a swimmer takes care of their athletic performance see-saw base triangle well, is able to remain on the peak performance side of the see-saw board more than on the injury side, they are more likely to reap the benefits of taper when it matters the most.

As you grow and mature, it can be hard to stay motivated when time improvements become less frequent. This can be particularly frustrating when teammates appear not to be affected the same way at the same time. What you should remember is that every athlete’s performance improvement path is unique. Every season has its ups and downs, as you continue to navigate your see-saw (see TOP TIP 1).

HELPFUL DEFINITION:

Taper is defined as “a progressive nonlinear reduction of the training load during a variable period of time, in an attempt to reduce the physiological and psychological stress of daily training and optimize sports performance (Mujika & Padilla, 2000)



**SCIENCE FACT:**

Using a total of 9956 swimming years' worth of backstroke data, researchers have concluded that swimming performance improves rapidly between ages 8 and 13 and diminishes as the swimmers approached their top performance potential around the age of 18. (Alsdokhi et al., 2020)

Critical Questions:

Swimming is a sport where you train hard for six months to be great for three days. To best prepare for the sport of swimming, ask yourself:

- How do I, as an athlete, define success? Does my definition of success include...
 - Outcome-focused factors? Ex: Winning medals; making the A final
 - Time-focused factors? Ex: Getting a new best time? Staying within a certain margin of a current best time?
 - Performance-focused factors? Ex: Quality of execution of race strategy? Skill mastery?
 - Process-focused factors? Ex: Practice attendance? Practice effort? Stress-management? Sleep routine?
- Does my definition of success change depending on a meet?
- How do I prepare for taper?
- Knowing what I now know about the athletic performance see-saw, how can I better prepare myself for a successful taper meet during the season?

