

January Reset: What We're Building Before Taper

January training always feels a little different on deck. The holidays are done, school is back in full swing, and the season suddenly feels real again. If you are a parent, this is usually the week you start wondering, “Are we training hard enough?” or “Why does my swimmer look a little flat right now?” If you are a swimmer, you might be thinking, “I should be faster by now,” or “My body feels weird,” or “I’m motivated but also tired.”

All of that is normal. January is the part of the season where we build the things that actually show up later when it matters. This is the reset. Not the New Year’s resolution kind where we promise everything will be perfect. The reset where we get back to work, tighten up the details, and stack good practices on top of each other so taper can do its job.

And yes, I’m going to say this plainly. Our goal this month is NOT to chase best times every weekend. Our goal is to build the athlete who is capable of best times at the end of January and again in March.

What January Training Is For (and what it is not)

January training is for building your “engine” and polishing your “skills” at the same time. That might sound obvious, but a lot of swimmers and parents separate those two things in their heads. They think technique work is for beginners and hard training is for older kids. In reality, the best swimmers in the pool are usually the ones who can hold strong technique when they are tired. That is not a personality trait. It is trained.

This part of the season is also where we intentionally create some fatigue. Not the unsafe kind, not the sloppy kind, and not the “I can’t get out of bed” kind. But the real training kind where the body has to adapt. In simple terms, training is more stressful during this time. When we manage it well and recover well, the body responds by getting better. That is the whole idea behind progress. It is why the hard practices are not random, and it is why the recovery pieces matter just as much.

What January is not for is panic. A tough practice is not proof you are behind. A bad set is not proof you are failing. A midseason meet that is not a best-time meet is not proof taper will not work. A lot of swimmers actually race a little slower during heavy training blocks because their legs are loaded and their nervous system is tired. That is expected. Speed is still there, it is just buried under fatigue, and taper is designed to let it show.

If you’re in Stroke 1, Stroke 2, or Stroke 3, January is about building habits that will make everything easier later. Better body position, better breathing, better turns, better confidence. If you’re in Performance groups, January is about staying patient while we build the kind of fitness that makes the last 25 of a race feel like you still have gas in the tank.

The 3 Focus Areas: Skills, Fitness, and Consistency

Let’s talk about what we are actually focusing on right now, across the whole program.

Skills matter because swimming is a sport where the water is always fighting you. Small changes make a big difference. If your head lifts on a breath, your hips drop. If your kick goes wide, your body line gets messy. If you turn with a slow tuck and no momentum, you give away free speed. Those are not “little mistakes.” Those are missed time drops over the course of a race.

One of the easiest ways to understand this is that swimming is heavily about reducing drag and improving efficiency. That is why we care so much about streamlines, tight lines off the walls, and stable body position. When a swimmer gets more efficient, they can go the same speed with less effort, or they can go faster with the same effort. Both are wins.

Fitness matters because technique alone does not hold up if the engine is not there. In January, we want swimmers to get comfortable working while tired, and we want them to get comfortable repeating good effort with enough rest to keep quality. That balance is important. Too much rest and you never develop the ability to sustain. Too little rest and everything falls apart into survival swimming. We are aiming for the middle where growth happens.

This is also where a simple science point is helpful. Your body adapts specifically to the demands you place on it. If we want swimmers to finish races strong, we have to train the ability to hold speed late. If we want a swimmer to feel confident in the 200, we have to train the aerobic system that supports repeated hard efforts. If we want 100 speed to show up, we have to train the nervous system to fire fast and clean. That is why practice is not one-note. We touch different systems on purpose.

Consistency is the quiet one, but it is the biggest difference-maker across our nearly 150-swimmer team.

For newer swimmers, consistency is simply showing up and building comfort. The more days you practice, the less “new” the water feels, and the faster you learn. Learning motor skills takes repetition, and swimming is a skill-heavy sport.

For experienced swimmers, consistency is what allows the training to actually add up. It is hard to build momentum if we practice once, then miss two, then come back and try to go 100 percent. Consistency also protects bodies because it keeps you in rhythm. The goal is not perfect attendance at all costs. The goal is a steady pattern that lets your body adapt safely.

If you are a parent reading this, consistency is also where you can help the most without needing to be a swim expert. Sleep, nutrition, hydration, and routine are the big four. Teenagers especially need more sleep than they think, and sleep is when recovery and learning really happen. A swimmer who sleeps well and eats enough will handle training better and feel more confident. That is not motivational talk. That is physiology.

How to Know You’re Improving Without a Best Time

This is the part I want every swimmer and parent to read twice, because it saves a lot of January stress.

You can be improving a lot even if the clock is not showing it yet.

One sign is effort feels different. A set that used to feel impossible starts to feel manageable. You still work hard, but you do not feel shocked by the workload. That is fitness. You are building capacity.

Another sign is your skills hold up later in practice. If your streamlines are still tight at the end of the hour, that is improvement. If you can hold your kick rhythm when you are tired, that is improvement. If your turns stay aggressive when your legs are heavy, that is improvement. Racing is basically doing all the right things while tired and under pressure, so this matters.

Another sign is your repeatability gets better. If you can hit the same pace more consistently, even if it is not your fastest pace, that is a huge step. A swimmer who can repeat paces is a swimmer who can race with control. Control is what creates drops.

Another sign is that your recovery between efforts improves. You get your breathing under control faster. You can talk sooner after a hard swim. You can reset and go again. That is the aerobic system doing its job.

And finally, confidence is a real metric. Not the loud kind where you pretend you are fine, but the quiet kind where you know you are doing the work and you trust the process. Confidence that is built in January is what makes taper feel exciting instead of scary.

If you're in Stroke 1 or Stroke 2, improvement might look like making a legal turn without stopping, breathing without lifting your head, or kicking on your side without rolling onto your stomach. Those are big wins. If you're in Stroke 3, it might look like cleaner timing, better walls, or holding technique across longer repeats. If you're in Performance 1 and 2, it might look like holding race habits in training, holding underwaters on purpose, and staying mentally steady through hard sets.

Every group has a version of progress that matters right now.

Pick One Focus

Swimmers, pick one practice focus and commit to it for the next 7 days. Turns, underwaters, breathing, or kicking. One focus. Not all four. Tell your coach what you picked so we can help you stay honest. If you do that for one week, you will be surprised how quickly your swimming starts to feel sharper.

January is where we build what taper reveals. Let's make it count.