

Different strokes

Need inspiration to improve your swimming? **Colin Reynolds** took a trip to Australia to explore a new way of training

Recently, I was lucky enough to shadow Paul Newsome, head coach and founder of Swim Smooth in Perth, Australia. I arrived 10 minutes early for the 5:30am weekly endurance session, joining a group of about 20 people already waiting to dive in. It was quite atmospheric as the sun was rising and there was a little bit of that nervous anticipation that you get on the start line of a triathlon, mixed in with some light humour. I met up with Paul who was preparing the Red Mist session; a term referring to an endurance set of 4km–6km. The format of

the set changes each week to keep it fresh but the workload is always around 5km and based on endurance training. This is the hardest and strangely the most popular session.

Each 50 metre lane has two groups of six swimmers, the first (or leader) in the group has a tempo trainer with the target length set, so they get an audible beep when they should be turning. The rest of the group follows the pace but not too close or they would be drafting.

The lanes are set at different speeds so it is possible to cater for a large range of abilities. The pace is changed as the session progresses. This ends up with slightly mesmerising synchronised effect as the

What is Swim Smooth?

Swim Smooth is a coaching system designed from the bottom up for distance freestyle swimmers and those racing in open water and triathlon. The programme focuses almost entirely on distance freestyle swimming – and for those who lack time to train (commonly swimming 2-3 times per week) focusing on freestyle will help you to achieve your best performances. This differs to other coaching systems like the Masters programme which develops all four strokes for pool competition as well as open water.



DESPITE THIS PARTICULAR PERSON ALREADY BEING A VERY GOOD SWIMMER, THE IMPROVEMENTS AT THE END WERE IMPRESSIVE



groups rotate round and round the pool as the steam rises.

Variety of life

One of the things that struck me was the range of ages, genders and swimming styles that were apparent in all lanes and groups. This supports the Swim Smooth methodology that the best swimming style/technique depends on the person. For example, you would expect a 6 ft 5in tall Olympic swimmer to have different physical abilities and range of movement to someone who is 5 ft 2in tall, not to mention the amount of time they have for training.

This is why they have created a set of swim types to help identify a person's swimming style and then create a range of drills and programmes to change the swimmer's stroke to be the most effective. The end result depends on what works best for that person in the pursuit of becoming a

"Smooth" or "Swinger" swimmer. These are swim types created by Swim Smooth and a very clever and helpful animation can be found on their website.

After the session we went for a coffee with some of the swimmers. They made me feel very welcome and there was clearly a very friendly club atmosphere. It was straight back to work as Paul had a 90-minute one-to-one video analysis session with an experienced and accomplished long course triathlete who wanted to improve his swimming to compete in some longer 5km and 10km open water races.

Improve through analysis

Video analysis is a tool that Swim Smooth uses to critique a swimmer's technique and identify areas that would benefit from some development. They have created a very large database of these analysis sessions, which has been used to create the Swim Smooth

swim types. All certified Swim Smooth coaches are trained to provide this service. This session started with a quick interview with the swimmer to find out his experience, goals and possible concerns. Then quickly into the water, swimming at a steady pace while Paul followed him with a video camera on a stick, enabling him to get shots from all angles above and below the water. This was clearly a process Paul has perfected, as he was not only filming but analysing the swimmer and talking to me about the swimming all at the same time. After a few lengths of the pool we sat in the shade with the laptop; it was here the analyses and feedback process started. Going through the clips in slow motion confirmed the initial analysis on the poolside but by watching the video, the swimmer could see where he was going wrong and understand how the suggested drills and training would help. This analysis was also recorded and the

athlete was given a USB drive with both the analysis and the raw swimming video on it.

Watch it, now learn!

However, that was not the end of the process - it was more the beginning. It was back in the pool to work on some drills and changes to the technique. During this process a communications device was used; a simple headset the swimmer wears and there is a small hand transmitter that allows the coach to talk to the swimmer. The benefits of this are huge, as you can see immediate changes to the swimmer as they progress rather than having to talk them through it at the end of the pool. So a range of drills and changes could be made rapidly making very good use of the time.

Despite this particular person already being a very good swimmer/athlete, the improvements at the end of the session were still impressive. This method would

clearly work equally as well for a beginner as for an elite athlete.

Back to group training

After the 90-minute one-to-one session it was straight into Paul's last swim session of the morning. This was a mixed ability threshold development session across two lanes. It was a combination of a swim training session with drills, with the added benefit of Paul's analytical swim eye correcting and suggesting small changes to individuals throughout the session. Again, the atmosphere was great and although there was some serious training underway, it felt like everyone was enjoying it, which is key to any learning.

It was a fantastic morning's shadowing and I would like to thank Paul for being so generous with his time and letting me shadow his morning coaching sessions. Not a bad office, pool side in Perth!

Learn to Swim Smooth

Paul Newsome was an elite swimmer and has represented Great Britain. In 2004 he founded Swim Smooth. He wanted to be independent from local, state or national governing bodies to allow him the freedom to develop a system that focuses more on the individual's swimming needs rather than just top squad performers. In 2008, Adam Young joined Paul and today they are the driving force and life blood of the organization.

In 2010 Swim Smooth was appointed the official coaching consultant to the British Triathlon Federation and, today, offers effective coach education and self-help programmes. Since then they have been appointed as swim coaching and education partners to the International Triathlon Union (ITU) world governing body, which gives over 119 national triathlon organisations around the world access to Swim Smooth. They are also the open water partner of Swim England (formally known as the Amateur Swimming Association - ASA).

They created an innovative animation that gives a visual aid to the swimming stroke that can be slowed down and viewed from different angles, along with an array of training information, drills advice etc, most of which is free! There is a worldwide network of Swim Smooth certified coaches that run swim squads and provide video analysis. If you're having trouble finding a coach or you want more detail on your training programme, there is the Swim Smooth guru facility, or online training system that gives individual coaching, as well as a wealth of training ideas and sessions so you never have to just swim the same old boring training sessions. If you are interested in swimming in triathlons and/or open water events I would strongly recommend checking out the Swim Smooth methodology and system. Find out more at swimsmooth.com