



**Doug Marocco**

## **Swimming actually is part of Triathlon**

I have commented that most triathletes can't swim. In fact, for years my license plate while living in California read "NO SWIM". This was mostly in reference to the sport of Biathlon later called Duathlon, but either way absent of water. The fact is that most don't have knowledge of the basic fundamentals of swimming.

Regardless of a person's swimming background or knowledge of proper stroke technique, a person will become faster by swimming more despite their form because they become more proficient and fit doing whatever they are doing. However, once people get tired, their form deteriorates and the repetitive nature of the swimming reinforces poor habits. Most new triathletes workouts should be geared toward a quality 1500-2000 meters with the main set performed after a short warm-up so that you are fresh when you start your swimming. After that everything else is to help the stroke and endurance.

Occasionally it is worth doing longer workouts to build endurance and get used to swim distance closer to Ironman. Regardless it is still 3800 meters at the most for any race and the distance is nothing compared to the biking and running distances.

### **Below you will find some important reminder to consider while swimming:**

**CROSS OVER THE CENTER LINE-** (correctly by entering about shoulder width or wider). This allows the arm to enter, drop and then start pulling while your body is rotating. It should almost feel like you are pulling on your side.

**HAND ENTRANCE-** The hand should enter relatively flat with fingers, then palm, wrist, forearm and elbow following. The angle needs to be downward immediately so that your actual pull starts about 18 inches or so below/and in front of your shoulder. With a slight tilt of the wrist and a loose hand, you start the pull to a point where your hand and fore are below the chest area.

**PULL -**The pull is key to moving through the water. No matter what you do above water, below water is what counts. A swimmer needs to enter the water with a hand continually going down on an angle that ends up at an eventual depth around 2 feet. As your body continues to move forward your arm will be pulling at the same time where the hand comes even with the elbow and is directly at chest level. At this time, the elbow remains in place and the hand continues to move under the body and back toward the groin and then moves out to the thigh.

**BREATHING-**In order to have a smooth swim stroke, it is important to be lateral breath. Regardless of if you race this way or not, you need to work on breathing on both sides of the body. Several reasons but of most importance is that most people raise the breathing side arm further out of the water than the non breathing side because when they turn their head, their arm follows with it and comes out of the water higher. You do not have to breathe every other stroke. I do three on one side then cross over to three on the other. This keeps my body, kick and arm movement better balanced.

**NO BICYCLE SWIMMING-** Instead use Front Quadrant swimming. I say this because many people swim with one arm then the other like a bicycle crank. In reality, it should be one arm up front and the other one coming to the front and just before it gets to the front area after entering (about shoulder width) the other arm starts its pull.

**POOR KICK PATTERN-** (corrected by an easy kick with very little movement that is balanced). Often times people kick too hard with one leg to counteract another problem like (cross over, bad head position, poor body roll).

**HEAD POSITION-**Keep the head low and looking at an angle out in front of you but not too far as to create drag. When you turn your head it should be in turn with your body roll, not a sudden movement to breathe. If you can roll properly, the head should roll out of the water enough to have one eye out of the water, mouth out to breathe and looking at a 10 and 2 position. Often times I see people breathing way under the arm pit and looking at 5 and 7 positions.

**LACK OF BODY ROLL-** The body should roll as you breathe and pull. Imagine pulling up a rope or stretching to reach the ceiling. You had moves up, should follow and to reach as far as possible, your body rolls with it toward the ceiling. Swimming is the same concept.

**DON'T GLIDE TOO LONG-** Long distance (all triathlons) swimming is done with a long stroke, but that does not mean to glide so long that you lose momentum. As soon as the stroke is complete, the other stroke has already started (front quadrant swimming) and there is no real pause in movement. Unlike a team of rowers, where you can see obvious movement, glide, then movement again swimming should appear to be a constant flow of the body moving through water.

**TOOLS AND TOYS-** Swimming is a minimalistic sport. Outside of shorts and goggles not much else other than a body of water is required. However, in order to help develop improvement, fins, buoys, drag suits, paddles, tubes...These all have a play in getting faster or at least in getting a better feel for the water. They are not to be used for your entire workout but can be used in addition.

**WETSUITS-** This is the single best piece of equipment for any triathlete that does not come from a swim back ground. It's first priority is to help keep you warm, next, it helps puts a person in the correct position to swim faster. This correction alone can make up missing out on competitive youth swimming. Speedsuits are the next closest thing when wetsuits are not legal.

**SEEK HELP-**Although you may think you are doing things correctly, most often you are not. Find someone to watch you and video tape so you can watch yourself. Even people that can't/don't swim can see good form and bad form. They can see it in you as well and until you see yourself, you will not know what you look like.

## **SWIM SETS – The Basics**

### **Warm Up (W/U)**

Should consist of 1/4 to 1/3 of your session and prepare your body for the Main Set

Examples: 300 Free easy, 100 Kick, 100 back, 2x50 Free

### **Main Set (MS)**

Will be the primary purpose of the session and will include distance, intensity or a combination of both

Examples: 5x200 FREE or 3X300 FREE with 15 seconds rest per set

3x400 free or 2X500 FREE with 30 seconds rest per set

### **Cool Down (C/D)**

Recover period from Main Set. Opportunity to perform drills and add total distance to the session

Examples: 200 Kick with fins, Backstroke, 1 - arm drills, Fist drills

End session with easy freestyle of 100-200

**About the author: Doug Marocco** is a nine-time (9X) Hawaii Ironman finisher with a PR of 9:23:04. In addition, he has been a USAT All-American for the past two decades while winning two (2X) National Age-Group titles and four (4X) Military National Championships among his 47 overall wins. An accomplished Marathon runner, Marocco has a PR of 2:33 in his 37 finishes at the 26.2 mile distance.