

Subject: Ready to Swim

Yesterday, May 26 kicked off the Triathlon Race Season. What I noticed was how many were not properly prepared for the swim start.

I know there are a number of adversities in the first 50 meters. There is race day anxiety; a crowded start line; tight restrictive wetsuits; cold water and cold air; a high adrenaline rush race start; novice swimmers and / or inexperienced racers; first race of the year jitters; stress of sighting; the wash tub effect; not to mention being kicked, scratched, clawed and your goggles may be knocked off and you may be swum over while trying to put them back on. I have had all of these things happen to me (happily not all on the same race day)!

The result is a significantly increased breathing rate, which leads to hyperventilation. And no matter how hard you try your heart rate and breathing rate will not slow down.

The Prevention:

(1) Swim Warm. Your body must be warm when you start the race or you will overload your aerobic system and hyperventilate. Warm up with a 10-20 min jog (just enough to break a sweat) and / or a 10-15 warm up swim with 5 x 10 stroke accelerations. Try to get in 5 min of good race pace efforts 10-15 min before the race start. This requires planning. Plan to be in the water 20-30 min before the scheduled race start if possible.

(2) Swim Late. Wait 10 sec after the gun goes off before you begin. This gives you more space at the start and reduces anxiety. It is better to wait 10 sec than floating on your back or doing breast stroke for 10-15 min.

(3) Swim Alone. Start your swim to the far left or right depending on which side you breathe. Move away from the pack until you have obtained a relaxed swim pace until the first buoy or first turn.

(4) Swim Slow. Anticipate that it will require much more oxygen at the swim start. Begin slowly and gradually increase your effort until you are at your goal race pace effort.

The Cure:

Despite all your planning you may find yourself in a swim start hyperventilating. This is what you do.

(1) Try breast stroke, side stroke or floating on your back.

(2) It is very hard to relax, no matter how hard you try to tell yourself to "relax." You must retake control of your breathing. To do this you must take large deep breaths – hold your breathe – then deeply exhale. Do not start moving until you have control of your breathing.

(3) As your breathing returns to normal start breast stroking. As your breathing returns when you are breast stroking, return to your front crawl a few strokes at a time. Start with 5 strokes front crawl – then breast stroke. Then 6 strokes front crawl – then breast stroke. When you are able to do 10 strokes front crawl you will be able to return to continuous front crawl (at a reduced effort). Concentrate on exhaling your breath under the water and swim with slow elongated pulls. It will take time but your breathing will return to normal as you are able to relax.

The good news is that you will learn from this and your next swim will be a better one.

Coach Steve