

Twist and Slide

Many outstanding male swimmers share a common uneven rhythm. I first noticed what was taking place while watching the famous Matt Biondi in slow motion. He appeared to developed power with both arms in succession, then release it in a slide on one arm, at this point his body was on its side and well aligned (streamlined) behind the outstretched arm. In time, as new stars started to shine, I noticed that they also followed the same pattern. Sydouvi(sp), Popov, van Hoogenband, Hackett and a host of other very good swimmers. But there is a difference in the way these top swimmers used the action.

Technique

Some swimmers consistently slide on the same arm: let's say the left arm; At that moment the right arm, having held the catch, will have developed the push-back, and have reached the fastest hand-speed at the end of the stroke. At that point the fastest swimming speed occurs and the swimmer holds the slide.

While still in the slide and lying on the left side; the right arm recovers quickly and aims for the entry spot - just before this happens - the left arm having finished the slide and now anchored at the catch, pulls hard using the hips and body core for power - this throws the body onto the right side where the right arm having reached the catch point, pulls hard using hips and body core to throw the swimmer back onto his left side and into the slide.

The whole movement that I have tried to describe is done at different speeds depending on the pace of the race. When racing over a short distance the movement is almost impossible to follow and is only seen as a quick uneven rhythm.

Most very good female swimmers use the slide but not quite in the same way as males. The best both side slides I have ever seen was done by Francisca van Almsick when she was doing a lot of fast swimming, including her 1:56.64, 200m free world record; more recently her stroke length has reached an incredible distance but for some reason her cycling rate has not been maintained.

Females appear to slide a very little more on one side than the other and the slide is not as pronounced as in males. If males or females haven't got the slide in whatever form, they do not shine in top international competition, some rare exceptions do happen in short distances.

Many good swimmers seem unaware of exactly what they are doing, but are swimming with a very nice slide. Many also, would benefit immensely from being taught the technique; it is not difficult to master.

Some swimming commentators keep talking about ‘riding high on the water’ giving the impression that it is the thing to do. If you think about it, you must realize that to ride high in the water either the swimmer must be very buoyant or be pushing down on the water to lift him/herself up. There is no other way that it can be done. I think that the picture of a speedboat lifting high on the water when it reaches a critical speed must somehow influence the thinking. I have even heard coaches tell swimmers to lift up in the water when sprinting.

Speed causes lift, but lift does not cause speed. And no human can reach a speed in water to create sufficient resistance to lift his body onto the surface. If you swim through the water, thinking rather of reducing resistance, your body will reach a level according to your composition, height, mass, resistance and speed. But if you lift yourself by pushing downwards, you are wasting effort in the wrong direction and will lose efficiency.

H.G. Lynn. E.mail: gorlynn@vodamail.co.za

