

training & technique



Get on the Ball!

Thinking of starting a dryland training routine incorporating an exercise ball? Take some advice from Steve Thompson, MPT, CSCS, dryland training coach for the USMS/USA Swimming High Altitude Training Camps.

Lately, the exercise ball has been bouncing into homes and gyms everywhere. Thompson calls it “a great piece of equipment.” Aside from being inexpensive, versatile and easy to store, an exercise ball provides “a dynamic surface” for exercises and core stability training, he notes.

“The list of exercises is endless and limited only by a person’s imagination,” says Thompson. “You could do any exercise in the gym and do it on the ball—bench presses, squats, shoulder exercises, sit-ups. The ball adds a higher level of challenge,” says Thompson.

Exercise balls come in several sizes. “Usually when you order a ball, the boxes will have the size recommendations based on the person’s height,” says Thompson. “Each company is a little different.” Although there are several different manufacturers, Thompson favors balls made by Gymnastik (<http://gymball.com/gymnastk.html>). He recommends exercise balls for swimmers particularly because of the core strengthening benefits.

“Core stabilization on the ball can help build trunk strength,” says Thompson, “which will help you maintain streamlines off the wall, decreased drag during the stroke and optimal technique and form. The stronger the core, the better the hip turn and motions during all strokes. Shoulder strengthening is easily done on the ball and benefits the shoulder, obviously, decreasing the chance of rotator cuff problems.” <<<

Workouts for Budding Triathletes

Not only is cross training great for the swimmer’s body, but it also can be an excellent way to get started in triathlons. If you’ve been considering entering your first multi-sport event but are not exactly sure how to begin, transition workouts are an easy fit, according to Jennifer and Ben Johnson, triathletes and owners of 3Sports, a multi-sport retail and custom bike shop in Richmond, Va.

A basic swim-to-bike transition workout simply involves cycling immediately after your swim workout. Cycling does not always have to happen outside, they note. Taking a spinning class or climbing onto a stationary bike for 30 minutes to an hour at the gym are convenient ways to get a back-to-back swim-bike workout program started. In fact, indoor cycling allows you to focus on specific techniques such as pedaling in smooth, even circles and one-leg push-and-pull drills. A number of gyms also offer bike-run-bike classes—another great transition workout that can be done inside on spin bikes and treadmills, or in combination with an outdoor



run. The idea behind transition workouts is to step up to longer multi-sport sessions, gradually building endurance and strength as you move from water to land.

And now that spring is around the corner, the Johnsons offer these tips for getting your road bike ready for the season:

- check tires for wear and damage
- check that brakes and shifters are in good working condition
- clean and lube the chain
- inspect your helmet for wear or damage
- if your bike has been sitting for a while, take it to a local shop for a basic tune-up. <<<

READERS ASK: Mastering the Butterfly

Q: Our reader question for this issue comes from the USMS Discussion Forum, where a swimmer asks: "Does the butterfly ever get any easier?"

A: Butterfly is difficult to coordinate, and sometimes very challenging to learn as an adult. According to swimmer/coach Dennis Baker of the Oregon Wetmasters in Portland, it does get easier with practice.

"I find most people have a problem with their timing," says Baker, who is also the fastest over-40 200 butterfly swimmer in the world. The timing problem comes when swimmers kick down while their arms are pulling down, he notes. That timing creates a bad body position. "It makes fly almost impossible to master."

Coach Emmett Hines of H₂Ouston Swims addresses the subject in his article, "Vive le Papillon."

"Most developing flyers tend to use their arms at one end of the body, their legs at the other end of the body and lug the core of the body along as cargo," Hines explains.

"My philosophy is that successfully racing 200 fly requires the ability to swim relaxed fly at a moderate pace for at least 500 yards. I wanted a 'doable' way for them to build up to 500-yard ability in practice." The result was Hines' "Half-Fly."

Baker follows a similar coaching philosophy: "I start by telling swimmers with this problem to not kick at all," he says. "Just let the legs drag and follow the hips. Once they do this for a while, we work on the timing of the kick."

The key to fluid butterfly is



"learning to connect the limbs to the core and initiate rhythm and motion from that core," according to Hines. "Once a person has a fluid skill set, the biggest roadblock is conditioning. Trying to swim more strokes of butterfly than your conditioning allows invariably causes you to regress."

Hines also plugs the fitness benefits of swimming non-freestyle strokes such as the butterfly.

"Swimming non-freestyle strokes is really a no-brainer," he says. "Adding a short-axis

stroke (breaststroke or butterfly) to the workout regimen dramatically increases the total percentage of total body muscle mass exercised." <<<

>>> To read the full version of Hines' article, visit the articles section of the H₂Ouston Swims web site at www.h2oustonswims.org.

>>> Do you have a training or technique question for our expert coaches? Send it to [Bill Volckening](mailto:Bill.Volckening@usms.org), editor@usms.org, or mail to: Readers Ask, c/o Bill Volckening, 1220 NW 119th Place, Portland, OR 97229.

my favorite set

Our featured "Favorite Set" for March/April comes from Doug Garcia of the WSU Masters in Pullman, Wash.

Warm-up

- 400 SWIM double-distance walls, low stroke count
- 100 KICK streamline kick without a board
- 100 KICK on side
- 100 FIST swim
- 100 BEST TECHNIQUE swim



Workout

- 4X100 FREESTYLE on a descending interval (The last 100 should be at an interval that you will barely make.)
- 4x100 IM on a descending interval (as before). Do a 100 kick before repeating the set. Repeat for a total of 1700.
- 200 EZ SWIM... stretch it out long.
- 8X50 FAST; broken as: stroke for the first 25, and freestyle for the second 25 (The idea is to go 2 Fly/Free, 2 Back/Free, 2 Breast/Free, 2 Free/Free)

cool down

- 100 EZ IM
- 2x75 broken as 50 EZ freestyle, and 25 sculling

>>> Do you have a favorite set to share with readers? Send it to [Bill Volckening](mailto:Bill.Volckening@usms.org), editor@usms.org, or mail to: Favorite Set, c/o Bill Volckening, 1220 NW 119th Place, Portland, OR 97229.

Web Workout

Each issue of USMS SWIMMER will point you online for a detailed workout in PDF format that you can print and take to the pool.

The March/April featured workout is from 2004 USMS Coach of the Year **Scott Williams** of the Olympic Club in San Francisco. The workout, called "Interval Progressions," is designed to help you incorporate core body movement with the arms and legs. The workout features an interval progression designed to challenge while encouraging good form. It also features an unusual drill called the "Faddle Drill," in which swimmers use one paddle and one fin in a variety of combinations. <<<

>>> To download your copy, visit usmsswimmer.com.

Advice on Push-ups

Looking to improve your stroke mechanics with better body alignment? Core stability is key. Push-ups provide a simple, inexpensive way to increase upper-body strength. Start with 10 to 20 push-ups three times a week and gradually increase the number, perfecting form before increasing reps. <<<

