

Train with One Stroke to Help Another – Ignore the Distance

I believe one needs to swim sprint butterfly to become a better distance freestyler. Likewise, to get faster at the 100 back, swim long *freestyle sets* all backstroke, like 3x500 back – and so on. As a Masters coach, I often encounter “yardage monsters” – people more concerned with distance than the quality of the workout. I don’t do a good job of feeding those monsters.

When I started in coaching at AGUA this past October, I challenged my new team to trust me and “buy in” to my approach until the end of the year. Although it was difficult to convince them that doing a true sprint set, with lots of rest, or an IM set, would be a good workout, this strategy has proven very positive. The trust is now there, which allows me to be far more creative with their training. My swimmers are telling me they’re swimming faster than they have in years, and are training harder with fewer yards.

Try this workout to add some efficiency in your training regimen. There is no running yardage total for the workout. I never write a workout trying to meet a yardage requirement. My swimmers know that if they ask me how many yards the workout was, I’ll respond with, “I have no idea.”

Instead, I write my workouts with careful regard to intensity and time – not a predetermined distance. I believe in energy system and stroke diversity, which results in incredibly different yardage totals. I know how long a set will take – “discounting” for slower lanes – so everyone finishes at the same time. Then I fit it into my hour-and-a-half workout timeframe.

warm up

- 4 x [100 free CU + 50 choice] – R:10
10 minutes

Focus: Catch Up drill (CU); maintain shoulder width – don’t cross over midline

tune up

- 4(3) x 100 25 kick/25 drill/50 swim – R:15
100 each in reverse IM order
8 minutes

Focus: Body position on each stroke

heart rate

- 12 (10,8) x 25 on :30, :35 or :40
6 minutes
12.5 fast/12.5 easy - 12.5 E/12.5F – 25 all easy – 25 all fast
Round #1 – free
Round #2 – non-free
Round #3 – choice

Focus: Perfect breakouts and finishes

kick set

- 12(10,8) x 75 Kick
18 minutes
Odds – 25 dolphin/25 flutter/25 breaststroke on back on 1:30 or R:15
Evens – all flutter on side; descend 1-6, 7-12 (or 1-5, 6-10, etc)
Focus: “Knees in” on BR, “from hips” on flutter and “head still” on dolphin

main set

- 4 (2) x 100 IM on 1st swim time + :15 seconds
- 3 (2) x 200 IM on double 100 IM interval
- 2 (1) x 300 (200)IM – R:30
50 easy choice
- 2 x 300 [200 free/100 #1 non-free stroke] – R:30
- 3 x 200 [150 free/50 #2 non-free stroke] – R:20
- 4 x100 [75F/25 #3 non-free stroke] – R:10
Focus: 100% of the set has legal turns and transitions

warm down

- 5(4) x 50 free ascending on 1:00 or 1:15
5 minutes

total time

- 1.5 hours

Coach’s Notes:

- Items in parenthesis denote a “discount” for slower lanes.
- Items in brackets explain the specifics of the set.

Craig Keller is a California native who recently moved to New York to lead AGUA Masters, after serving as assistant head coach for three years at Davis Aquatic Masters in Davis, Calif. As an intercollegiate swimmer, Keller specialized in 100- and 200-yard breaststroke and was UC-Davis Scholar Athlete of the Year in 2004-2005 and 2005-2006.