

Peaking and Tapering Strategies – Getting it right the first time.

By Wayne Goldsmith ... again, details can be readily applied to most sports.

There's Harry Potter. There's Star Wars. There's Disneyland. And there's one other magic and mystery experience
peaking and tapering swimmers (athletes).

But, what is peaking and tapering?

PEAK – Preparing Each Athlete's Capacity (capacity) to perform at their best.

TAPER – Training Activities that Provide Excellence after Rest.

Success
=
**Producing Your Best
When It Counts**

Peaking is about training swimmers to swim at their best. **Tapering** is ensuring that the swimmer's can produce their best on a specific day following a period of rest, recovery and regeneration.

Let's try to unlock the magic and mystery of coaching swimmers to perform at their best when it matters most.

PEAKING:

In the famous book **ALICE IN WONDERLAND**, Alice comes across a road which splits and leads off in several different directions. She is faced with a choice of which path to take.

She sees the Cheshire Cat in a tree and asks the cat, "Which path should I take?"

The cat smiles and says, "The depends on where you want to go."

Alice says, "I don't know where I want to go".

The cat replies, "then it doesn't matter which path you take".

Swimming can be a little like this. Many swimmers and coaches are working hard, stretching, doing dryland training etc. without a clear goal.....and a goal with a time frame attached.

Remember a **GOAL is a DREAM with a DEADLINE.**

At the beginning of the season, two critical questions need to be answered:

- What does the swimmer need to be able to do?
- When do they need to be able to do it?

Ask each swimmer in your team to write this sentence:

I want to achieve on (date)

For example, **I want to achieve a time of 65 seconds for 100m freestyle on the 15th May 2007.**

Your job as coach is to plan a program which gives each swimmer the opportunity to achieve their stated goal. Having the swimmer state their goal makes planning the program easier!

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PROGRAMS
General Programs
Setting Goals (Naber)

An excellent structured example

TAPERING:

There are a lot of tricks, tips, magic and miracles written about tapering but there are **six key principles** that actually work:

1. Decrease the VOLUME of training in the taper period

The single biggest improvement in performance during the taper period is due to a significant decrease in training volume. During taper, as training volume decreases so too does residual fatigue – meaning the swimmer begins to feel light, fast, energetic and strong in the water.

Hint: Decrease training volume between 15-20% during each week of the taper.

2. Maintain the INTENSITY of training in the taper period

Many swimmers and coaches are afraid to work hard during taper. In fact taper is a great time to work hard as the decrease in volume means that swimmers can often achieve race speeds easily during taper.

Hint: Include a small amount of specific race pace work at every session during the taper. This should include race specific dives, starts, turns and finishes and breathing patterns – race speed *plus* race quality technique and skills!

3. Maintain the FREQUENCY of training in the taper period.

One of the biggest mistakes coaches make when designing a taper is to decrease training frequency, i.e. fewer sessions. The motive is a good one – they want to allow swimmers the chance to rest, recover, maybe sleep in and regenerate.

However, allow swimmers time to sleep in and this is what generally happens:

- a. They wake up at the same time anyway and can't go back to sleep.
- b. They stay up later at night knowing they don't have to get up early and end up having less sleep than usual.
- c. Their body sleep / wake rhythms become unsettled leaving them feeling flat, tired and lethargic.
- d. Once they experience a week or two of not getting out of bed at 5 a.m., they start to like it and may not return to morning training
- e. All of the above

Hint: Have swimmers attend all morning workouts during the taper period. If you like, give them an afternoon off for some free time / social time with team mates.

4. Make the taper SWIMMER SPECIFIC

Everyone responds differently to a taper. Even swimmers of the same gender, the same age and competing in the same events will respond differently to a taper.

Hint: Practice the taper at a minor competition several months before the major meet. Encourage each swimmer to keep a “taper diary” throughout the “trial” taper recording how they feel, how they slept, if they experienced muscle soreness, was their energy level high or low, and other relevant information. Use this to base the major meet taper upon.

5. Don't introduce anything NEW

Another common problem is the desperate need for coaches, swimmers and parents to make the taper more than it is and to start adding new things at the last minute. Commonly this means changes to diet (e.g. adding a new SUPER HIGH PERFORMANCE SUPPLEMENT), or, equipment (e.g. new pair of the latest super fast goggles). Keep it normal! Don't introduce anything new during the taper – keep the environment as normal and simple as possible.

Hint: Don't introduce anything once the taper has commenced – that goes for nutrition, gym work, technique, skills and equipment.

6. Don't OVERCOACH

The most successful way to coach during taper is.....the same way you usually coach! Some coaches feel the need to OVERCOACH - by giving too many instructions too late in the preparation and only confusing the issue. Keep it simple.

Swimmers will often feel confused and stressed during taper and the lead in to big meets. What they want from you as a coach is the three C's – CALMNESS – CONFIDENCE and CERTAINTY. The best coaches demonstrate the three C's regardless of the level of competition.

The closer you get to competition **DECREASE** the number of instructions and coaching interventions and practice the three C's.

As a general rule during the final week of taper, give the same number of instructions as there are days before the meet, i.e. with five days to go, coach a maximum of five specific areas, with three days to go, focus on only three areas and on the final day on just one thing.

For example:

Butterfly

FIVE DAYS TO GO

Work on kick, arm pull, hand speed, hip drive and rhythm.

THREE DAYS TO GO

Work on kick, hand speed, hip drive and rhythm.

FINAL TRAINING SESSION

Think Rhythm.

Today
is the tomorrow
YOU
created
yesterday

One final comment – it's not the taper that makes the difference it's every session.

The key to successful performance is consistency in terms of quality coaching everyday in all things. No matter how well you plan, prepare and prescribe your taper does not make up for months of poor technique and skills in practices.

Successful swimming is not an accident – it is the result of a carefully planned program implemented with quality, passion, enthusiasm and consistency by talented coaches and swimmers.

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