

# the POOL'S EDGE

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## TRAIN LIKE A SWIMMER!

BY KARLYN PIPES-NEILSEN

When triathletes train for cycling or running, they train like a cyclist and a runner. However, when a triathlete trains for swimming, they often train like a triathlete.

No streamlines, no kick, no rest, no warm-up. And they typically swim only one stroke—freestyle—with a pull buoy.

If a triathlete wants to improve his or her swimming, then perhaps they should train like a swimmer.

“Masters swimming offers a non-threatening environment where triathletes can learn how to become better swimmers,” says Frank Marcinkowski, head coach of Curl-Burke Masters (CUBU) in Virginia. CUBU has grown to more than 500 members by partnering with the likes of Team Tri-Z and the DC Tri Club.

“We are not an elite, adult swim team,” he says. “It’s fun. Every person that walks on deck is welcome.”

Masters programs can attract triathletes to their programs by opening up their practices to all skill levels and educating them as to the many benefits to swim-specific training.

However, sometimes triathletes need to be convinced, so here are nine suggestions why training like a swimmer can help them at their next triathlon:

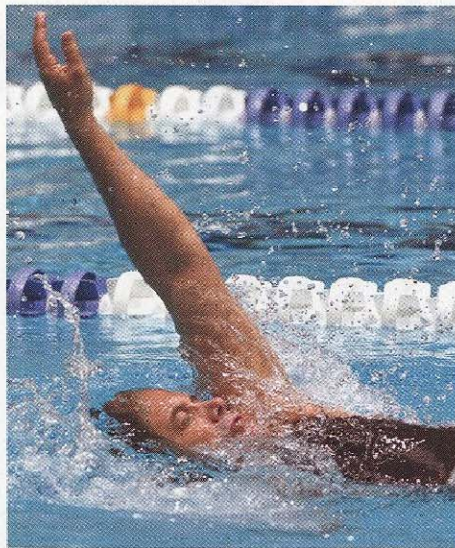
**Join a Master’s team:** “As a triathlete, your fastest swimming is ahead of you—I guarantee it,” says Coach Marcinkowski. “Just show up.”

**Streamline:** Sure, there are no walls in an open water swim. *Duh.* However, most of the year you are in a pool, so why not

become a better pool swimmer? A good streamline—with a goal of at least five yards—will lower your swim times and has the added benefit of increasing shoulder flexibility and range of motion.

**Don’t neglect your kick:** Kick sets build strength, improve ankle flexibility and can help the legs recover from hard bike or run days. Even if you are not good at it, kick anyway. Use swim fins occasionally, but don’t get addicted.

**Do the “other” strokes:** Training is really boring if you only swim freestyle. In a triathlon, all of the strokes can be used—fly for “dolphin diving” on a beach start, backstroke to watch for incoming waves



[PHOTO BY PETER H. BICK]

**ABOVE »** Training is really boring if you only swim freestyle. In a triathlon, all of the strokes can be used, such as backstroke (above) to watch for incoming waves.

and breaststroke to sight a buoy. Figure out which stroke comes easiest to you, and then give it a try.

**Quick turns:** A turn in swimming is the equivalent to a transition in a triathlon—it’s a part of the sport. Whether you use a flip turn (faster) or an open turn (more air, but slower), pretend the wall is really *hot*, and get off of it as quickly as possible. Don’t forget to streamline!

**Rest is good:** Intervals are set according to the purpose of the set. Short rest sets are designed either to challenge you, to build endurance or both. When the interval is generous, it usually means it’s time to swim fast. Cool your jets and take the rest—you probably need it!

**Focus on technique:** You can work harder, but if your technique is poor, you will not get any faster. Become more self-aware by using your eyes to watch your stroke. Take a swim clinic or get videotaped—the camera does not lie!

**Warm-up and cool-down:** Skipping warm-up or cool-down means you are eliminating one of the most important components of training. An easy-paced, 15-minute warm-up allows the body to wake up gradually. A 200-400-yard cool-down will help you recover for your next workout.

**Swim in a meet:** If you sign up for a Masters meet, you are more likely to keep swimming during the off-season. Enter distance events such as the 1,000 or the mile to measure your progress from year to year.

As USMS coach Bob Bruce of Central Oregon Masters Aquatics always says, “In a triathlon, the path to the bike leads through the water.” ♦

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