

Coaching Widely Varied Ability Levels in the Same Workout



Presenters



Marcia Benjamin

- Head Coach and Founder, MEMO Swim Team
- 2021 USMS Club of the Year
- 2014 Pacific Masters Swimming Coach of the Year
- 2013 Kerry O'Brien Coaches Award Recipient
- 2006 Dorothy Donnelly USMS Service Award
- USMS Level 4 Coach
- ASCA Level 4 Coach
- WOWSA Level 5 Coach



Karyn Austin

- Founder and Head Coach of SWAG
- 2023 Florida LMSC Coach of the Year
- 2020 USMS Kerry O'Brien Coaches Award
- USMS Level 3 Coach
- USMS ALTS Instructor
- USAT Level 3 Coach
- Swim Smooth Certified Coach

Coaching Widely Varied Ability Levels in the Same Workout

Marcia Benjamin

Everyone Gets Something!

HOW DO YOU ADAPT WHILE STRUCTURING YOUR WORKOUTS?

Keep the FLOW

1. Avoid long waits trying to get all lanes together
2. Don't overlook the fastest lane OR the slowest lane
3. Challenge all athletes where they are

Ways to accommodate differences in the same lane

- If two people, split the lane so that they can go on different intervals
- Have faster swimmer do stroke/slower swimmer do freestyle
- Do relay-style swims, where one person swims at a time (sprint)
- Faster swimmers do farther distances (400 vs 350)
- Slower swimmers use fins for same set (but not all the time)

Widely Varied- How Wide?

- Former D1 Swimmers
- High School Swimmers who haven't swum in 30 years
- Triathletes
- Lap Swimmers who are curious
- Folks who can't kick/do breaststroke/butterfly/see the clock

Have assigned lanes!

- Keep similar speed people in the same lane to give everyone a good quality workout
- But not all the time!
- Allow lanes to mix when rearranging for times swims, or OGAAT sprints
- Encourage social kicking sparingly and partner swimming for variety

Ways to Be Inclusive

- Have every lane go on the same rest interval, some lanes do fewer reps. This requires a little “Mathing”!
- People feel like they’re all getting the same workout when they starts sets at the same time and get out at the same time.
- But they don’t when they see everyone waiting for them to finish. They feel like the slow ones, and that does not make for a good team atmosphere.

MATHING!

- 4 x 75's Fly/Bk/Br @1:10 + 6 x 150's Fr @2:10
- Equals
- 4 x 75's Fly/Bk/Br@1:45 + 4 x 150's Fr @2:45
- Equals
- 4 x 50's Fly/Bk, Bk/Br@1:30+3 x 150's FRr @3:30

More sets that end at the same time!

- 16 x 25's Sprint/EZ @:30
- Equals
- 12 x 25's Sprint/EZ @:40
- Equals
- 8 x 25's Sprint/EZ@1:00

More sets that end at the same time

- $2 \times (400 @ 5:00 + 2 \times 50's @ :40 + 50 EZ @ 1:40)$
- Equals
- $2 \times (350 @ 5:15 + 2 \times 50's @ :45 + 50EZ @ 1:30)$
- Equals
- $2 \times (200 @ 4:00 + 3 \times 50's @ :55 + 50EZ @ 1:15)$
- Equals
- $400 @ 10:00 + 5 \times 50's @ 1:15$

Breakout Exercise #1

Create a 15-minute set

- Break up into groups of 8-10 people
- Create a 15-minute set with adaptations for 3 varying ability levels
- 10 minutes



CREATE an inclusive environment!
Karyn Austin

3 Varied Groups to address are:

1. **FITNESS SWIMMERS** – Athletes who don't typically compete in Meets or OWS Events. Their focus is more on fitness and enjoyment.
2. **TRIATHLETES**- Athletes who have a primary focus of building swim fitness and skills to compete in Triathlons at a variety of distances.
3. **EXPERIENCED/COMPETITIVE**- Athletes who have a background of competitive swimming at an Age Group, High School, or College level. Proficient in all 4 strokes.

Our goal is to NOT make these groups seem inclusive!

FITNESS SWIMMERS



- Know their WHY
- Find challenges during practices to get them a wee bit out of their comfort zone, but with a great chance of success
- Involve them in social aspects of the team
- Involve in planning/volunteering at meets

TRIATHLETES

- KNOW their race schedules (or at least their “A” race of the season)
- Adapt some workouts to focus on prepping them for the distance they are training for (750M, 1500M, 1.2 mile, 2.4 mile)
- Build in open water skills to some workouts while in race season (sighting, drafting, staying on course)
- Focus on PACING! Do they know their swim gears as well as bike and run gears?



Don't assume triathletes have open water swim skills!



Triathletes, what can YOU do as a coach?

1. **TECHNIQUE-** Teach them how to work with the water, higher heart rate does NOT always mean speed.
2. **PACING-** Do they know their gears? Give them opportunities to test their pace and ability to stay within their own ability/fitness levels.
3. **OPEN WATER SKILLS** in the pool- sighting, drafting, balanced stroke to be able to hold their line in open water
4. **CONFIDENCE-** Endurance to complete the distance, ability to pace, ability to start fast and get heart rate down while swimming.

Triathletes, know them!



- Have Post practice Send off for major events, this was for Ironman Maryland
- Post race results on your social media page and/or announce in practice
- Recognize first time Triathlon finishers or first time at a new distance
- Pay attention to their race results, especially their SWIM splits!
- RECOGNIZE improvements in the swim!

Experienced/Competitive Swimmers

- Make them love swimming again!
- Help with mindset of comparing “old” times
- Find a new challenge
- Use their experience to mentor new swimmers
- Set challenges within each workout



Breakout Exercise #2 – 10 minutes

- Small Groups
 - Get with the same small group, Be prepared to present your ideas
- Topic : What are some ways you can engage with and make each of the 3 groups feel more included on your team?



Wrap Up / Q&A

Don't be afraid to ask. If you're
thinking it, someone else is too!



Thank You!

Slides, Resource Links, and Panelist
Bios will be posted on the USMS
website