

What “Elite” Swimmers Need From A Masters Coach

Molly Hoover — Joliet Blue Tides, Illinois
Chad Durieux— Rose Bowl Aquatics, Southern Pacific



Molly Hoover

Molly is a Level 4 certified Masters Coach from Illinois where she leads the Joliet Blue Tides Masters Team. She has been coaching in some capacity for over 30 years. Molly is currently the Chair of Illinois Masters as well as Chair of the USMS Coaches Committee.

Molly grew up in Iowa and started swimming with a team at age 6. While she never fell out of love with the sport, she's never had as much fun swimming as she is now!

Molly and her husband Kurt have 2 kids, Myka is 21 and Eli is 18.



Chad Durieux

Head Coach of Rose Bowl Masters for the past 21 years. Level 4 USMS Coaches Certified. Level 3 ASCA. Level 3 CSCTA (Canadian Swim Coaches/Teachers Assoc.) Grew up in Canada and swim with various teams until moving to the US in 2005. Joined Rose Bowl Aquatics as an Age Group Coach but transitioned to Full-time Masters in 2008.

4-time SPMS Coach of the Year. 2010 USMS Coach of the Year.

Purpose

- Help Masters coaches understand what their fastest adult swimmers need from coaching:
 - Technically
 - Physically
 - Mentally
 - Relationally
- Recognize that elite masters athletes bring different goals, schedules, bodies, histories and motivations to the pool

Opening Ideas

- **What makes an elite masters swimmer “elite”? Who in your workout group are we talking about?**
 - For this presentation, we are looking at the fastest swimmer in your practice at any given time. They may have a lane to train with, or they may be 20 seconds per 100 faster than everyone else who shows up. How can we meet these swimmers’ needs and still make them feel part of the team?
- **Why are we devoting an entire session to this?**
 - Oftentimes, the fastest swimmers are ignored because they can work through a workout on their own or because the coach doesn’t feel they have anything to add to their knowledge of swimming. But elite masters swimmers usually do not need less coaching because they are experienced – they need more precise, individualized coaching and accountability.
- **The coach’s job is more than writing workouts:**
 - Create the Environment
 - Give Feedback
 - Provide Structure
 - Accountability

Know the Athlete

- **What do you need to know about a swimmer before starting their training?**

Write down 5 things you would want to know about a new “elite” masters swimmer before changing/starting their training

- Athletic history: former collegiate/pro swimmer, lifelong swimmer, late returner, or adult who developed later.
- Current goals: racing, national/international qualification, personal bests, longevity, fitness, or a combination.
- Life context: work, family, travel, sleep, stress, and limited training time.
- Training history: what has worked, what has caused problems, and what the swimmer already understands.
- Physical context: aging, injury history, mobility limitations, recovery needs, and individual response to training.
- Why they are joining your program.

Know the Athlete



- [RJ](#)

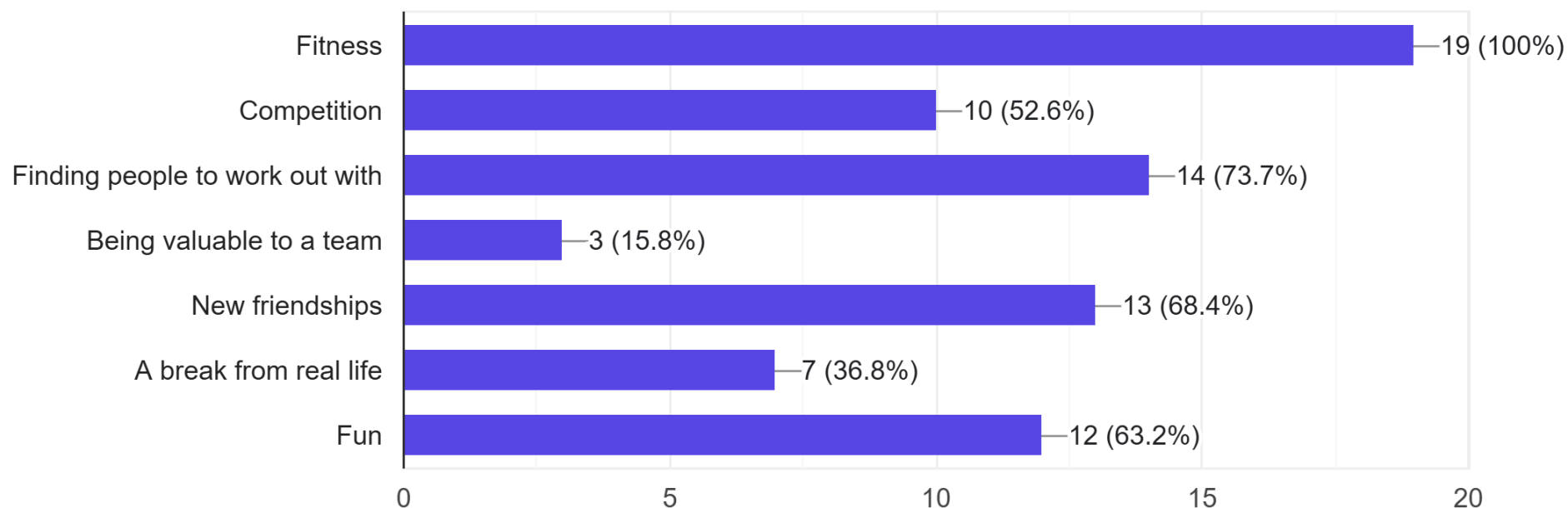
Know the Athlete



- [Adil](#)

Know the Athlete

We asked 19 “Elite” Masters Swimmers what they were looking for in Masters Swimming:



“Don't be afraid to push them. Ask if they just want to get in shape or if they are looking to compete again. Ask if they're wanting to improve/form/technique or if they just want to workout. Ask for their input in their own training.” – Chris, former D1 swimmer

Training

- **What helps them make the decision to stay with a team or move on?**
 - People they can train with
 - Coaches who can train them
 - Having both will keep them coming back!
- If you don't have anyone else that can keep up with them, find ways to adjust workouts so they have some time to be social between repeats or sets
- Find ways to have someone (or something) to race!
- Make the objective of each set clear: aerobic development, race pace, threshold, speed, power, skills, recovery, or race rehearsal.
- Use appropriate intensity and volume, but recognize that recovery between quality efforts may need to differ from when they were younger.
- Avoid assuming that every experienced swimmer needs more yardage.

Training – Advice from an Elite swimmer

- I think people who have spent a lot of their life swimming competitively have an intrinsic ability to motivate themselves when given the right workout. I think they would more often like to be pushed by their own internal intensity rather having overly intense coaches. That said, having a coach that provides some encouragement and keeps an eye on rep times adds some accountability and goes a long way toward complimenting a swimmer's internal motivation. I don't think these types of swimmers want someone yelling at them or pushing them the way an age group/college coach would. People who swam at a high level are used to purposeful workouts and appreciate when a set is well thought out and has a clear objective. This allows them to set goals for themselves within the set. Getting back into swimming after an intense college career is a sort of complicated journey, and I think an understanding of that from the perspective of the coach is important as well.

Training

- **How do you individualize within a group workout?**
 - *With your breakout group, pick one of the following scenarios:*
 - *Create a simple 2000 yard freestyle threshold set for a lane with Steven, Chris and Bill*
 - *Steven can hold 100s on 1:10, Chris can hold 100s on 1:20, Bill can hold 100s on 1:20 for about 5 in a row, but then falls off the pace*
 - *How would you set up an “Off the Blocks” set of 6x100s with 12 swimmers in 4 lanes.*
 - *Steven will hold :55 or better, 10 swimmers will be between 1:05-1:45, Max will be 2:45*
 - *Describe a power/strength set where you can use different equipment to “even the field”*
 - *Let’s work on Fly! You have 6 lanes with 3-4 to a lane.*
 - *5 of your swimmers are newer and still just learning fly.*
 - *4 of your swimmers were college swimmers and can handle a “fly set”.*
 - *The rest can do fly but it will fall apart after 200 total yards or so. Except for Paula. She won’t do fly. Period.*

Training

- **Potential Training Tools**

- Race splits - using your stopwatch is critical
- Stroke rate - most advanced stopwatches can do this
- Stroke count - they can do this but you help track or remember this for future use
- Heart rate - keep it simple 6 sec HR check at the neck or purchase some easy to use HR monitors
- Power metrics - polar, vasa and other more expensive equipment or just have Dr. G come out
- Video - absolute must with all swimmers but also very helpful for your elites
- Training logs
- Meet history - easy to look up on swimcloud or usms
- Equipment - try new things like parachute, fulcrum paddles, tower power racks, etc. This can challenge your elite swimmers with things they may not have had or used in the past
- **Technology can help compliment training at any level, but it can never replace your skills and knowledge. Be sure to find a healthy balance in your training.**

Technique

- **How do you coach an athlete who has been swimming successfully for 20-30 years?**
 - Collaboration and communication are key
 - As a coach being open to their thoughts and ideas as well as bringing your own to the table
 - Help them feel included as part of your team
- **When should you leave a technique alone?**
 - Never-things change over time and it's never too late to have more advice no matter how amazing they were/are as a swimmer
- **How much feedback is too much?**
 - Try giving one thing at a time. Adding in too much at once can be confusing as with all of your other athletes, Elite swimmers like to take one thing at a time to work on them.
- **How can you make technical feedback actionable rather than overwhelming?**
 - Simple, direct and accountable





(

Communication, Trust and Accountability

- **Masters Swimmers usually want to understand “why” they are doing something**
 - It may be obvious and need no explanation: sprinting, stroke work, etc.
 - Trying a new drill? Explain what it works on. If you don't know, find out before you coach it.
- **Establish how and when the athlete wants feedback**
 - During practice?
 - After practice?
 - By message?
 - Through video review?
 - Other ways?
- **How do you earn credibility with a swimmer who already knows a great deal about training?**
 - Ask for their feedback
 - Grow trust by following through and know the athlete as a person
 - Use objective markers when possible. Know their splits or pace and let them know. No need to judge, just let them know you're paying attention.

Recovery and Longevity

- Recovery is part of the training plan
- Sleep, work stress, travel, nutrition, mobility and life demands affect training and competition
- Teach/remind top athletes to distinguish productive discomfort (soreness) from warning signs (pain) that require adjustment.
- Plan for longevity
- What signs tell you an athlete needs recovery instead of another hard set?
 - Technique is falling apart
 - Heart rate stays unusually high
 - Repeated small aches and pains that aren't resolving
 - Motivation suddenly drops
 - Effort and performance aren't matching

Recovery and Longevity

- Survey question to Elite swimmers: What does success look like for you now?
 - Consistency and improving my adult times, not worried about prime times
 - Getting to practice 3 days a week and having a good time
 - Having a decent showing at Masters Nationals, but really just having fun!
 - Staying in shape and feeling strong in the water
 - Being injury free
 - Having fun in the sport
 - Fitness and some competition success
 - Maintain four practices per week and going fast times at our state meet
 - Breaking records: team, state, and national!
 - Staying at a competitive level. I get slower every year, that I've accepted. But if I can lose only a little each year, then I know I was consistent in my training for the season. With work and other responsibilities, that's always a challenge, so accomplishing that is always a success.

Recovery and Longevity

- *List three “green flags”, three “yellow flags”, and three “red flags” for training readiness.*

The Mental Side

- Adults may carry strong expectations, previous athletic identities, fear of decline, or pressure to prove themselves.
- Help athletes focus on controllable behaviors
 - [“What Mental Performance Coaches Wish You Knew” – Swimmer Magazine, July-August 2026](#)
 - Is their jaw clenched? Is their stomach in knots? How is their breathing? Once they recognize that they’re there, they can enact strategies to get out of it.
 - Avoid assuming confidence is automatic just because an athlete is experienced
- Use post-race conversations to learn rather than immediately judge
 - [“How to Rebound From a Poor Performance” – USMS Website Article, Anne Minard, Sept 28, 2020](#)
 - Let it out. Talk about the race, but set a time limit.
 - Get Critical – of the swim, not yourself!
 - Expand your ‘hit points’. Have multiple points that mean success: certain number of kicks, breathing patterns, stroke count or technique points. Have something other than final time to evaluate.
 - Find new reasons to swim. Eventually, times will peak. What else do you want out of it?

Case Studies

- Case 1: Former college swimmer who now trains only four days per week but wants to qualify for a major meet
 - Case 2: 40 year old sprinter who wants to go faster but keeps asking for more yardage
 - Case 3: Highly experienced swimmer who rejects a technical change because “I have always done it this way.”
 - Case 4: Athlete with excellent training but disappointing championship-meet performances
 - Case 5: Athlete who is improving but is becoming increasingly exhausted outside the pool
-
- **What would you ask first?**
 - **What would you change?**
 - **What would you leave alone?**
 - **How would you communicate the change to the swimmer?**
-
- **How do you focus on your team but still give attention to these types of swimmers? What is the balance and can you recognize when it's off balance? (maybe put on the sheet but not here. Thinking question...)**

Questions every masters coach should be able to answer:

- What does this swimmer need most right now?
- Why are we doing this set?
- What is the athlete's limiting factor?
- What does this athlete respond to best?
- What is the minimum effective dose of training for this athlete?
- What does the swimmer need from me that they cannot get from a workout sheet?
- What will success look like at the next competition?
- What can I do to help this swimmer still love swimming five or ten years from now?

Key Take-aways

- Elite masters swimmers need a coach who can individualize, communicate, challenge and listen
 - They need training that respects both performance goals and adult life
 - They need technical feedback that is purposeful, not change for change sake
 - They need accountability without losing ownership
- At the same time, the rest of the swimmers need to know they have a place on the team no matter *their* experience and ability

More advice from Elite swimmers:

- Pay attention to meets and race results and acknowledge success. Be aware of different USMS recognition programs, like top 10 rankings and All-American honors.
- I don't need my own lane, but once in a while it's nice to have a set where I can let 'er rip. Also, some sets, such as sprints on longer intervals, can accommodate individuals with a more varied skill set.
- Encourage elite swimmers to race/push each other where possible. Incorporate a variety of workouts that challenge both/either aerobic and anaerobic systems.
- Keep it chill. I've lived the stress fueled training life and have no wish to go back. I enjoy the laid back atmosphere of masters swimming.
- Know what advice to give them for outside of the pool work outs - this is much more important than we understood previously. Keep up with best practice for prepping older athletes from competition and possibly differences between men and women.

Even More advice from Elite swimmers:

- Encourage athletes to explore new events: Suggest trying unfamiliar events, open water swims, or triathlons to keep competition feeling fresh and reduce performance pressure.
- Being elite doesn't make someone a good coach or even a good judge over their own training. Help them help themselves
- I think from the few masters teams I've swam with I think one thing we can do more is high speed, slow interval work. More opportunities to interact with other speed groups (team relays at practice or something like that so we can meet more people)
- I think building the right environment matters most--one that gives direction rather than pressure.
- We don't always have to do totally different sets. It's often more fun to swim together with others by increasing the rest and increasing the intensity.



Wrap Up / Q&A

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

Next Steps / Take Action

- Mentors: find people throughout USMS or USA swimming to help you with your elite swimmers. Build a list of people that you know and trust to help you out when needed.
- Talk with your “elite” swimmer or swimmers. Make sure you are aware of their current goals and discuss how to achieve them and get the other benefits of swimming with a masters team.



Thank You!

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

Resources

- Reach out to the USMS Coaches Committee
 - Ask about pairing up with a mentor coach
 - Bring up a scenario you are dealing with and we'll ask for ideas
 - Email clubandcoach@usmastersswimming.org
- Reach out to Molly or Chad
 - Molly: mhoover@jolietpark.org
 - Chad: cdurieux@rosebowlaquatics.org