

Open Water Swimming

By Rob Cole

It is April in the Carolinas and time to start thinking about ramping up outside activities. For most of us, that means more yard work. For the lucky, it means it's also time to ramp up the open water swimming! Whether you are a hard core pool swimmer or a seasoned triathlete, the open water swimming experience is something not to be missed. It is quite different from pool swimming in the fact that you have no walls and no center lines. This can be quite illuminating for stroke imbalance problems. If you plan on racing in the open water environment, your skills and training need to support many dimensions. This month we will talk about training requirements and next month some race specific expertise.



If you have ever raced an open water event, you know that it calls into play a great number of skills as well as every race speed you have in your arsenal. If you are planning your first event, this means you need to be ready, willing, and able to go anaerobic at various times during a race. This necessitates a training plan that simulates this dramatic change in efforts. The typical race profile starts with a moderate to high effort level with a moderate, sustainable effort in the middle and a high effort level to finish. This pattern holds for the first leg of a triathlon too. If it is a triathlon leg, the finish will not be as high an effort as it would be for a standalone swim.

What all this means is that you should work in endurance sets that involve speed work and race simulation high efforts at the beginning and end.

Below is a 3,000 yard pool workout that allows you to work on sprinting while still getting a good endurance workout.

- 500 yards/meters warm up
Use any combination of strokes and drills
- 8 x 50 yards/meters on 1:00
Adjust the interval if you are faster or slower. These are fast!
- 400 yards/meters crawl bilateral breathing
Practice sighting once each length.
- 4 x 100 yards/meters on 2:00
Adjust the interval as needed. Another fast set.
- 400 yards/meters crawl bilateral breathing
Practice sighting once each length.
- 400 yards/meters alternating hard and easy
Alternate 25 sprint with 25 easy
- 500 freestyle warm down with bilateral breathing
Swim easy. Concentrate on good form.

A Word about Sighting

My favorite, low energy, sighting method is the sneak-a-peak. Sneak-a-Peek sighting is performed by swimming and in rhythm lift head forward to alligator eyes and in one motion return to the water for a breath. If you picture an alligator swimming along with just the eyes out of the water, this is what you are striving for. Your nose and mouth stay under the surface of the water while looking forward.



Alligator eyes work best in calmer waters. You can also practice head high "Tarzan" swimming too. This is a high energy way to sight.

If you haven't experienced open water swimming, you should look into the large number of races available in the Carolinas. Not to mention that the swimming leg is the hardest for triathlon teams to fill and teams are always looking for someone to fill this gap.