

Tapering....A State of Mind, Body, and Heart

by Patty Waldron

Here are some practical thoughts on tapering from Coach Patty Waldron Head Masters Coach Mecklenburg Swim Association Masters.



It's time to put it all together.....season ending performances! Often at this time of the year you hear the word taper....a seemingly magical word. Most often the word taper refers to less volume and sharpening of skills in preparation of putting together a season/life time best performance. Taper has to be intertwined into the season plan. What is most important is the seasonal preparation that sets up the taper phase of your season.

Taper in the Masters world has real individual meaning verses the age group situation. Age group teams are composed of athletes close in age and ability. Typically age groupers have the opportunity to practice more often than adults and train higher volume than Master swimmers. In contrast, Masters coaches have the following variables to deal with when considering tapering.

1. age range of athletes (could be 20 year olds through swimmers in their 80's)
2. difference in ability levels within the training groups(s)
3. frequency of training
4. volume(daily and weekly)
5. complimentary activities (running, weight lifting, yoga, etc)
6. individuals goals (make sure goals are challenging and realistic)
7. individuals key races they are prepping for (sprint, mid- distance or distance, or all distances)
8. personal habits (sleeping, eating, confidence, mental toughness, work schedule)

Matching what is needed for the taper considering age range and ability levels is the biggest challenge for Masters coaches.

Coaches need to have their season plan and cycles of training in place in the season plan. There needs to be dialogue with the athletes with regards to when the season ending performance is as well as what events the athlete will be focusing on. Given the variables listed above tapering for the Masters swimmer needs to be personalized within reason. Taper should not really be overemphasized to the point that the athlete believes all his/her eggs are all in one basket. The foundation throughout the season is they key for great season ending performances.

Intensity of work done is more important than volume during this time. Very fast swimming and goal pace swimming should make up the bulk of the work with appropriate rest. There should be time allocated for specific skill work like turns, and starts. In general a taper would last two weeks. Distance swimmers will want to have a bit more volume then your middle distance and sprint types. It is also good to have sprint sets and distance sets end at the same time; this is good for team harmony!

Athletes need to listen to their body during taper and compliment the work that is done in the pool with aspects out of the pool such as positive nutrition, consistent sleep, low work stress, and backing off complimentary activities. Also athletes need to keep all self talk positive, mentally preparing to be the best. Be confident in your preparation, fine tune your skills and practice your race plans. If you are successful in working consistently

across the season and you do your best to control the variables above, you should have awesome season ending results.

After your season ending performance it is good to reflect and assess your season, not just the taper. You hear a lot, "the coach blew my taper." Well not getting the results you want may well have been in something you did or did not do during your season preparation, not something that happens in the last two weeks. There may be something that happens totally out of your control that derails your performances. Whatever the outcome, enjoy the health benefits of the journey.....you have already won the race!