



[PHOTO BY PETER H. MCKE]

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Getting Race-Ready

BY MICHAEL J. STOTT

Here is a coaches' guide to pre-meet warm-up and post-meet warm-down.

Edwin Moses, multi-time Olympic and world champion, used to stretch more than an hour a day. Excessive? Probably not, given that he went undefeated in the 400 meter hurdles for nine years—and 122 consecutive races.

And while Michael Phelps hasn't quite matched that record in the 200 fly, Paul Yetter, a former coach at Phelps' North Baltimore Aquatic Club training ground, can vouch for the importance of warm-up as a part of pre-meet preparation.

PURPOSE OF WARM-UP

"The purpose of warm-up is simply to raise your core body temperature and get your stroke together and mind ready to race," says Yetter, now an Auburn University assistant.

"The goal is not yardage! The goal is to warm your muscle groups, listen to your body, build your confidence and get a feel for the water," agrees Dave Prutow, coach of the Tri Hampton YMCA Swim Team in Newton, Pa. (Premium Online Members: see the sidebar, "Word to the Wise," for a summary of Prutow's thoughtful treatise on readying the body to swim fast.)

Most coaches utilize established warm-up procedures, reserving the right to alter them based upon meet size, format, pool configurations and time constraints.

Typical in-water warm-ups for high schoolers can run anywhere from 20 to 40 minutes per team. College squads have from 40 to 60 minutes, and club teams as much as an hour and 20 minutes. Those timelines are in addition to stretching or light calisthenics that teams may do in advance of entering the water.

Prior to Katie Hoff and his monumental North Baltimore success, Yetter coached the Verona, Wis. boys and girls high school teams to state championships. Shared warm-ups with opponents placed a premium on prompt entry.

"I found if we got the group in within a minute and sent them off every four seconds, they would all fit and basically accomplish what we wanted them to do. If we had stragglers and if people missed part of the warm-up, then we just had chaos.

"At Verona, we did not do an extensive warm-up. Getting the core body temperature up was the goal, and given a short amount of time, it basically meant keeping everybody moving.

"I put the majority of the team on a basic plan. For weaker swimmers, my guiding principle was maintenance of stroke. I did not want inexperienced swimmers doing a lot of struggling just to keep up with their teammates. For them, I did not make yardage or a set amount of swimming a goal at all. Ninety percent of athletes in the high school world benefit from just keeping it going and mixing it up—that is, swimming, kicking, drilling, but not much

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