

Q & A WITH COACH EDDIE REESE

By Phillip Whitten

Coach Eddie Reese, head men's coach at the University of Texas, knows the importance of technique in training. It's his job to tie everything together and to emphasize to his swimmers how important technique is to achieve success. The January issue of Swimming World Magazine features a Q & A with Reese, entitled, "Getting It Right." Following is the second part of that interview:

Q: Swimming World Magazine:

You currently have three guys--Aaron Peirsol, Brendan Hansen and Ian Crocker--who are the best in the world at what they do. What's the difference between those three guys and your "average" Division I NCAA qualifier?

A: Coach Eddie Reese:

Well, their technique is excellent, and they just need nudges. We've got a couple of drills that they like and that they use to get their timing back. For someone like Brendan (Hansen), the issue usually is timing. Technically, Aaron (Peirsol) is probably the best guy around for his stroke, in any country, anywhere. What really separates these guys from their competitors, though, is more from the neck-up than from the neck-down. Yes, they train hard, but everybody trains hard. I think that Ian (Crocker) probably trains harder, relative to the events he swims, than anyone I know. I know everyone trains hard, but Ian is swimming the 100 fly and the 100 free, and he's over in the distance lane pounding out the yardage. And he can do that.

Q: Give me an example of what he does.

A: OK. About two weeks ago, he broke 20 minutes for a 2,000 (yards). Now that's no big deal for a distance man, but for a sprinter, it's a pretty big deal. Garrett Weber-Gale did the same thing--he broke 20 minutes for a 2,000, and he's a 50, 100 and a soon-to-be 200 man.

Q: What are some of your favorite drills that you have your guys do to work on technique?

A: When I was at Auburn in the mid-1970s, we were doing about 10-15 drills per stroke. And it was taking the swimmers too much time to learn the drills, so I whittled them down to two or three per stroke. I love to do one-arm drill for butterfly, but you just gotta do it right! I won't let them do it wrong. Just giving somebody a drill to do and letting them do it any way they want to do it doesn't mean you're working on the stroke.

Q: What's the difference between right and wrong for the one-arm fly drill?

A: Most people, when they're doing one-arm fly, bring their hand high out of the water, then throw it in (the water) in front of themselves, which helps get the head and chest down, and gets their hips and feet up. I make them point their hand at the side of the pool and keep it about four inches above the water to do that drill. Then the only way they can get their chest down is by concentrating on it and pushing it down, instead of using the momentum from the arms. You watch any little kid doing one-arm fly, and they all bring their arms out higher than their freestyle arm.

Q: Now, is it important to replicate the stroke you use in a drill when you're racing?

A: I don't think so. I'm not one of those who believe that drills must replicate the stroke...or vice-versa. Sometimes, in a drill, you might want to over-emphasize some aspect of a stroke. Sometimes you just don't worry about certain parts of the stroke when you're doing something else.

Q: What kinds of breaststroke drills do you use?

A: More timing drills than anything else. We do a breaststroke kick drill, which is four kicks, two strokes. And during the four kicks, you don't breathe. Your head's down, and you get to take two strokes. There are lots of variations on that drill: three kicks, two strokes, two-two, two-one and one-one. I just came up with this drill because I wanted to have them do fast kicking, I wanted them to control their breathing and I wanted them to use their arms a little bit.

Q: How does that drill help breaststroke timing?

A: Well, what they focus on is they can't pull their hands apart until their feet hit.

Q: So they're in the streamlined position for a while.

A: Yes, but only for an inch because the instant their feet hit, I want their hands coming apart. That's because when you race, your feet are not together and your hands have already started (to move) apart.

Q: Even in the 200?

A: Maybe not in the 200 long course, but in a 100 long course or a 200 short course. That was a very good question.

Q: Thanks, Eddie. What about backstroke drills?

A: The very best drill for any single stroke is the backstroke spin drill. That makes the hands go in the right place, makes the head hold still. It

allows the hands to move faster than they're going to move in a race, and I do believe it's the hardest thing you can do in the water.

Q: I agree. It's very hard. It's especially hard if you have shoulder problems....

A: If you have shoulder problems, then you just don't do it. I don't push that envelope...but, then, we don't have shoulder problems

Q: You don't have shoulder problems with your team?

A: No, we don't have shoulder problems...not very much. If we do, it's because they come in with them.

Q: OK, since I've asked you about the other three strokes, what about freestyle drills? I know there are hundreds, if not thousands of freestyle drills, but which ones do you like?

A: Freestyle? I like all the one-arm drills: the one with both hands out in front, the one with one hand at the side where you take a left-arm pull and breathe on your right. That's a little more advanced drill.

We do a lot of catch-up drills with an 8-inch dowel, a round stick. I use a stick so we don't put our hands on the midline too much. You don't want the hand to enter on the midline.

Catch-up drills make them use their legs and allow them to focus on where they're aiming with their hand, underwater.

Q: Thanks, Eddie. As always, it's been enlightening talking with you. And fun, too.

A: Anytime, Phil.