

Weight Training for Masters Swimmers

By Jim Green Asheville Masters

For those of us out there who harbor a secret desire to look ripped in our swimsuits this article is not for you. If you want to use weight training to go faster or to prevent injury then hopefully you have come to the right place. In last month's newsletter there was an excellent article on Coach Dave Sabo and his specific training theory. Let's face it, competitive swimming is broken down into sprinters and distance swimmers. Even at the Masters level the two areas are very distinct. I have yet to talk to some one who specializes in 50 through a 200 yard distances that have any desire to swim a 10k open water swim. I believe the latest expression a sprinter gave me for such a swim was ", I would rather be beat on with an Iranian bull whip". That is a scary concept since, as I understand it, an Iranian bullwhip has a cat of nine tails with metal tips.

One good thing about weight training is that not all of us can get to a pool. Up here in the mountains it is not unusual in the higher elevations to feel like we live in Maine in the winter. Raleigh gets rain, we get snow on mountain roads. If you incorporate a weight program into your training a missed water day is just another chance to train a little differently.

I became a certified Dryland Training Coach through ASC so I could get current information on dryland training. I figured, since I am getting older, something needed to be added to the equation of swim training. I think of dryland training as the Viagra of masters swimming.

I also was privileged to spend a weekend conferring with the great Richard Shoulberg, the Coach of Germantown Academy, who coached 16 Olympians as well as the great open water swimmer Franny Grippen. By incorporating smart dryland training into their program they were able to generate championship results for 30 years in a 6 lane 32-year-old pool.

Jimmy's rules of Dryland Training are as follows:

1. Training must be specific. If you want to sprint fast you need to work on fast twitch muscles and power so you can engage the early vertical fore arm with speed and force. If you think that just going into the gym and bulking up with heavy weights is going to get you faster, I have a used pair of goggles I would like to sell you.
2. Training must be time efficient. It is better to have a solid 20 minutes workout three times per week and do it consistently then to train hard for 2 hours while looking in the mirror and dreaming of becoming the new Arnold Schwarzenegger.
3. Training with weights can get you injured. If you have not been trained in proper technique, get a good Coach to help you. The basic rule of the American Swim Coaches (ASC) Dryland Training School is when in doubt always utilize the full range of motion on an exercise.
4. The Queen of Dryland training for swimming is the Vasa trainer (<http://vasatrainer.com/>). A complete weight program, that is swimming orientated, is available on the Vasa web site. In fact the Vasa people will help you set up your own program. Vasa is nice because Masters swimmers always have a time crunch. We need bailout options when we cannot get to a pool.

The Vasa costs less than a membership at the YMCA. There are 2 options for a Vasa. The one machine offers a reading of the power output when you do the workout. The other Vasa slides the training pad over a rail and is good for working on your catch and vertical forearm movement. I have tried both machines and find that for age group swimmers the power output concept tends to work well because they can measure improvement. With Masters Swimmers, it really depends on the personality. Some of us love to watch the reruns of 'Breaking Bad' and "House of Cards" while we workout. Others are very driven. If you want to increase power output the meter system is the best.

5. Specific training is of paramount importance. For distance swimmers high repetitions and low weight is important. For sprinters a good deal of power movements are necessary with fairly low repeats.

The best way to get started on a dryland program, that makes sense, is to ask to observe a college session near you. The following programs have excellent dryland programs and the Coaches are very liberal in sharing information; NC State, UNC, East Carolina, Davidson. UNC – Asheville and Warren Wilson. Good luck and plan on at least a year to see a difference in your swimming.