



CONQUER THE CHAOS

USING THE POOL TO PREPARE FOR OPEN WATER

BY DREW SURINSKY

CROWD Management

Swimming in a crowd can be uncomfortable. Getting bumped, kicked and hit is common and usually just annoying, but serious injuries can occur. To minimize their likelihood, use your arms as fences and antennae.

fences: Keep your lead arm slightly bowed out to let people know you're there and to protect your head.

Antennae: Use your lead arm to feel what's happening in front of you—usually somebody kicking.

Tip: Swim with good body rotation. Besides making you faster, swimming on your side creates space.

DRILLS

Two across: Two people swim very slowly side-by-side in a lane while staying together. Swim a length with each hugging the lane line. Move a little closer each length or so until they're sharing the stripe and bumping each other, moving closer only when comfortable.

Three across: Same as two across, but with three people in the lane. Switch positions so that each person gets the middle.

Four across: Same, but with four people in the lane.

Shuffle Drill: Remove some lane lines and group into two heats of 3-4 each. Heat one stands side-by-side, about two arms' width apart. Heat two stands similarly a couple yards behind. Heat one begins swimming very slowly. Heat two starts soon after and passes heat one, swimming between them. Trade heats so everyone passes and gets passed.

In the past decade, triathlon has transformed from super-jock niche activity to a nearly mainstream sport, and one consequence I've seen is a tendency to enter races lightly. You might be a great runner, cyclist, or even swimmer, but making your way through a frenzied open-water swim requires thorough preparation. After all, visibility's usually poor and you'll most likely be packed in with other swimmers, many of whom are doing their first swim without lane lines and a stripe.

While it's impossible to predict every encounter, you can prepare for some common scenarios. Below we'll describe panic, navigation and crowd management drills that let you experience and develop strategies for the swim to minimize surprises on race day.

Panic

Besides the novelty of the situation, common panic producers are cramps, inhaling water, getting off course, getting bumped or hit, or losing goggles. Having a panic plan is the difference between those being catastrophic or manageable.

The key is to practice an easy move that gets your face out of the water and lets you find your way. For most people, this will be breaststroke, sidestroke, treading, or rolling over and floating. Try each a few times to see which is easiest, then make it your panic move.

Practice panicking alone and with a group so

DRILLS

Practice these panic scenarios:

- **Inhaling water:** Go into your panic move and take easy, slow, shallow breaths.
- **Losing goggles:** Look for your goggles for a few seconds and decide what you'll do if you don't find them. Some will swim normally; others will want a stroke that keeps their faces out of the water.
- **Cramps:** Practice floating vertically or prone and massaging the cramp.
- **Life Threatening Situations:** Practice waving an arm over your head.

your panic move becomes automatic. Swim some lengths and "panic" in the middle. Don't rush out of the panic move or worry about

losing time. Wait until you've truly collected yourself, take a few strokes, and if you re-panic, repeat your panic move.

NAVIGATING

There's no stripe in a lake, so you must look above water for your reference points (usually buoys). It's nice if your sighting fits your stroke rhythm.

Method one—Look then breathe: I like this because it encourages glancing while streamlined, then rolling to breathe and stroking normally.

Method two—Breathe then look: This can interfere with streamlining and stroke rhythm, but some people take to it easily.

DRILLS

Drill 1—Pick Your Method: Stand in water and bend forward with your torso in swimming position. Select a "buoy" and try each method to determine which suits you.

Tip: In freestyle, one arm reaches forward while the other moves backward. Steer with the front arm by reaching toward your destination, like steering a boat.

Drill 2: Designate a buoy and spot it while swimming. Initially, glance once per stroke cycle. Reduce your spotting to every two stroke cycles, then every three, etc.

Drill 3: Repeat drill 2 but close your eyes when head is down. You'll quickly sense how often you need to glance up to stay on course.

Drill 4: Remove some lane lines and try drills 3 & 4 diagonally.

PROTECTION

DRILLS

These partner drills involve a kicker and a swimmer. The kicker hangs on the pool ledge, kicking in a reclined position facing the swimmer.

• **Slow, Gentle Kicking—Both hands in front:** The swimmer submerges and observes the kicking. Next the swimmer stands, leans his torso forward, puts both hands in front of his head (i.e. streamline position) and walks closer until deflecting the gentle kicks with his arms. The swimmer repeats this head-on and sideways from each direction.

• **Slow, Gentle Kicking—One hand in front:** Same as above, but the swimmer holds only one arm in front. The swimmer does this head-on and sideways, keeping the forward arm between her head and the kicker's feet.

• **Slow, Gentle Kicking—Stroking:** Same sequence, but swimmer is stroking. Swimmer should experiment with different arm positions.

Repeat the same sequences, but with harder, turbulent kicks.

Traveling drills use the same sequences, but the kicker backstrokes.

Safety Tips:

The kicker should always face the swimmer.

The swimmer should not swim with head submerged until certain where kicker's legs are.

COMBO DRILLS

Two rows of two across: Heat two starts after heat one and stays on the swimmers' toes. Add more people to each heat, then add a third heat.

Practice starts: Remove lane lines, bunch up in a group and practice mass starts. Add a designated panicker, who churns hard and has an excessively fast turnover. Others practice staying loose and swim their own race.

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