

Swim Power versus Stroke Efficiency

As you know, speed is not always directly related to effort. (If this comes as a surprise think of one of those recreational swimmers you see from time to time that dive into the pool, and begin thrashing about, tossing water in every direction, looking more like a big splash moving slowly down the pool than a swimmer. This guy has a 200+ Heart Rate (HR) by the end of 25 yds and is probably done with his entire workout. Lots of effort, not much speed.) Speed is more directly related to efficiency than energy expenditure. At any given physical effort level if we improve efficiency (as measured by strokes per length or SPL) we increase speed.

This gives us a natural, and very challenging, focal point for moderate intensity sets. Let's say the set is 10x200 holding a 130-140 HR(2—23 count in :06 secs.). The idea would be to see how fast you could swim each repeat while staying in the HR range prescribed. Not working harder, just swimming faster. The key here is to improve the efficiency of the swim. Decrease your SPL by increasing distance per stroke, improving your streamline position, longer glides off each wall, being aware of and avoiding unnecessary resistance etc.

And keep track of your times for each repeat. This is very important because improving efficiency can be deceiving. If you are one of the majority of swimmers that consciously or unconsciously equates effort with speed then, when you swim more efficiently, your internal speedometer may erroneously tell your brain you have slowed down. Use the clock for speed feedback and learn to trust it.

This efficiency=speed concept takes some getting used to. Applying it in workouts takes mental activity and involves lots of trial and error. Once you get good at this at moderate intensities you can apply the concept at higher intensities.

Give it a try.

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