

Program Description –

The Pacific Sea Wolves currently have about 140 members swimming out of two facilities. The primary facility is in South Surrey and it's a six-lane pool in which they have access to five lanes for 1.5 hours Mon-Thur and 2.5 hours on Fridays. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays they also have access to a dive tank, which hosts their pre-competitive groups. They have morning lane time at the Fleetwood pool. They get three 50-meter lanes on Mondays, Fridays and Saturdays days and two on Wednesdays. Needless to say, pool time is one of their primary challenges. A new facility is under construction and, upon completion, stands to radically alter the club's complexion. Brad and Annie Dingey have been running the club together for the last nine years. They put a great deal of emphasis on team coaching but it would be fair to say that Brad is the lead coach for the Senior Group while Annie directs the Youth and Black groups and generally oversees the Developmental groups. None of the groups are exclusively run by one person.

Raison d'etre –

I chose to spend time with the Brad and Annie because the Pacific Sea Wolves have enjoyed sustained success in recent years with a club composition that is at least relatable to my own. They are running a community centered age group program with a finite number of kids.

Dryland –

One of the ways the club has dealt with its pool time limitations is by prioritizing their dryland program. All of their competitive groups have 2-3 dryland practices a week. The club has invested in their dryland program both in terms of equipment and expertise. Annie has spent time learning from some of the best experts in the country. The dryland practices for the older groups are roughly 45 minutes apiece. They take place at a nearby park in all but the worst weather conditions. The park has a ravine trail system that includes several sets of stairs, a track and a field. They use medicine balls on a regular basis. The dryland practices I watched were always targeting the same energy system as the swim practice they corresponded to. They included a wide and diverse number of exercises. There was some general strength work, but core fitness was clearly the top priority.

Practice Environment –

I was caught off guard by what a relaxed environment Brad has facilitated with his Senior group. The coaches and swimmers enjoy a familiar and respectful relationship. Brad's very upbeat at practice and almost never raises his voice beyond what's required to be heard. Sets are never written on a white board but rather are delivered orally. Usually they weren't repeated beyond clarifying a point or two. The sets were almost universally complex, often requiring multiple equipment changes. The kids were clearly used to this process. Instances of kids not understanding the sets were pretty rare. When a kid wasn't on the set, or wasn't performing the set as it was laid out, Brad didn't jump down their

throats. Rather he would interject with a quiet word. Annie took a firmer hand with the younger groups but was still extremely patient and respectful.

Equipment –

Brad had his groups using equipment all the time. Virtually every set utilized multiple pieces of gear and the kids were forever swapping different items on and off. They were clearly used to it because it was always done without fanfare or comment. Brad would use equipment to knock the kids off balance, to facilitate a particular tactile sensation, or sometimes, just to keep a set manageable. One example was a sprint set in which the first repetition was done with paddles, immediately followed by a rep without paddles in order to gin up some hand speed. All the kids had their own, kickboard, paddles, snorkel, pull buoy, band and fins. Almost all of those items came into effect within each practice and as often as not, within one set.

Periodization –

Brad doesn't use an extensively layered periodization. He believes in keeping his weeks fairly consistent. Consequently, he doesn't build to huge volume weeks or drop down very low for peak competitions. This seems to be a marriage between the club's pool time limitations and his own beliefs. Brad also mentioned that he doesn't like to start the season with an extensive technique phase. As it was laid out for me, the Sea Wolves start the year with a long period focused primarily on aerobic work. Once there is a level of fundamental fitness then Brad feels more comfortable trying to make technical changes. After Christmas they start to prioritize speed work more. Brad definitely doesn't think in terms of specific energy systems but rather specific race requirements. They're very aware of their competition calendar and the heavier weeks are timed accordingly. In so far as they cycle both Brad and Annie run a two cycle season with the first cycle ending after the short course season and a second, more condensed cycle, carrying them through to the summer.

Coaching –

Brad spoke extensively, and glowingly, about his staff. He prides his staff on being diverse in their demeanors and approaches to coaching. They try to hire people who are well educated (even if not specifically in swimming) and then give them broad autonomy to do the job as they see fit. Annie does distribute a monthly memo to the coaching staff reminding them of upcoming dates, and identifying areas to focus on, but the staff is given broad freedom to interpret and implement the suggestion as they see fits. The club has been creative in how it utilized its professional development budget to develop their coaches. Brad also has emphasized the need for breaking some of the traditional gender roles found in swim coaching. PSW has some male coaches working primarily with their developmental swimmers and female coaches that work regularly with the older groups.

Technique –

We didn't go to extensively into technique but we did talk about priorities. The club definitely puts a premium on body position above all other technical considerations. I was able to watch Brad review some training camp video with a number of his swimmers and their body position was invariably the first item of discussion, irrespective of stroke. I

think the feeling is that if you're not able to get a kid into a proper body position than fixing anything else is window dressing.

Stets –

A couple of interesting sets from the week:

A speed play set from the Monday night senior practice

3x 150 fr band pull – 50 smooth/50!/50 medium (Paddles) @ 2:20
150 fr band pull – 50 smooth/50!/50 medium (No Paddles) @ 2:20
3x 100 stroke (fins) - #1 25 smooth/25!/50 smooth @ 1:40/#2 25 smooth/50!/25 smooth @ 1:40/#3 25 smooth/25!/25 smooth @ 1:50
2x 25 fr – 12.5!/12.5 smooth @ 35
25 smooth @ 35
25 fl kick! From a dive @ 35

- This set had the paddles/no paddles dynamic for hand speed. The 150's also featured moderate 50's after max efforts to get the kids to recover without totally collapsing their technique.

An aerobic set from the long course Wednesday morning senior practice

3x 300 fr band pull (paddles) prog 100's 1-3, last 25! @ 5:00
200 fr (fins + paddles) 80% effort @ 3:00
2/3/4 x 100 fr (holding 1500 pace) @ 1:40

- The times on the 100's were pretty impressive by the end of the set, some of the older boys got rolling and there were some pushed 58's.

An anaerobic/tolerance set from the Wednesday afternoon senior practice

2x 2x 75 stroke - #1 25 smooth/25!/25 smooth, #2 25 smooth/50! @ 1:20
2x 100 fr (best time + 6-8) @ 1:30
4x 50 stroke fastest average @ 50
3x 100 fr (best time + 6-8) @ 1:40

- The remarkable thing here was that the 100's were the "recovery" portion of the set. He wanted the kids to be able process and utilize their lactic acid.

Take Aways –

One benefit of dawdling with this report is that I've had a month to implement some of the things I took away from the visit.

- 1) We need to work harder – This might not seem like an earth shattering insight but seeing what the PSW kids were able to do day in day out made it very clear to me that our kids will have to do more if they're going to keep up. We've absolutely

- raised the bar on the work we're doing in the last month. While some kids have wilted, more have accepted the challenge and will be better for it.
- 2) Kids can function on tighter pace times – As a subset of working harder it was obvious that Brad's swimmers were comfortable working on much tighter pace times than mine (when comparing kids of like abilities). This was particularly true on warm up, kick, drill, and technique based sets. The PSW kids were very able to function on short rest. It didn't impede their ability to meet the technical requirements of the sets nor cause excess anxiety. So far we've successfully clamped down on many of our intervals, particularly on kick sets.
 - 3) Band pull and streamline kick – These are hardly new concepts but they are things PSW was doing regularly and which we're doing much, much more often of now.
 - 4) Presentation matter – The kids take their cues from you. If you are calm and confident about how you present a workout to your swimmers they are more likely to be the same.
 - 5) Perception matters – Sometimes it's more important to make sure the kids (and coaches) "feel successful" about a practice than what was specifically accomplished. Success can snowball into more success but so can failure snowball into more failure.
 - 6) The best thing you can do for your kids is to take care of your business – This echoes something I've heard from other successful coaches. While different swimmers might have different impacts on a team's competitive success, every swimmer holds equal value when viewed as participants. Happy participants breed more participants and having more participants is the surest route to finding great swimmers. I wouldn't say this has changed my approach to my own club, but it was something Brad felt strongly about so it was important to mention.