

From Leisure Swimmers To The World Championship – Swimming Just Once A Week!

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It took 263 days to achieve our almost crazy sporting goal: Three women swimming in the Swim Smooth swim club in Prague, all over 40 with families and young children to look after. We'd just set some personal bests racing at the Prague Masters and Jennifer suggested: "Girls, what if we now try to compete at the swimming World Championships?"

Maybe it was the alcohol in the celebratory drink we were enjoying but we all looked at each other in surprise and immediately said *Let's go for it!* We agreed that we are going to compete at the next World Swimming Championships in Kazan, Russia in August 2015.



„Hey girls, what if we swam on World championship in Kazan?“

Most 'leisure' swimmers who think about attending a top event like the World Cup think - "To succeed there I would have to train every day with a huge workload! I have to be at least a former national representative to have any chance of success! If I haven't trained continuously for years then surely I will fail".

These were our first thoughts too and it seemed at that moment a sheer folly. But we attempted it because we have in the hands the best instrument in the world - the Swim Smooth coaching methodology. Although as full time mothers, wives and employees, we do not have much time for regular workouts like other athletes, but thanks to the efficiency of Swim Smooth we said that we will succeed at the World Championships, **even if we go a different route than others.**

We weren't sure at that moment of the qualifying times and how we would balance training with family life and summer vacations so did some research and decided after looking at the event schedule to target the 100m freestyle event. On the FINA official website we discovered that Jana needed to improve her time by 4 seconds, Gabi was already fast enough to qualify but could qualify in a faster by improving her time and Jennifer currently just competing at 50m must gather more experience over the 100. With Jana, then nothing except our will stand in your way. Encouraged by a common goal, we adjusted our parameters and started to train differently.

Our "Combat" Plan!

The 100m is a sprint event and sprint training is a little different to normal Swim Smooth training for distance events and of course it didn't contain any open water components either.

We looked at our current training routine and kept the **frequency** of workouts at **once a week**. We changed the **intensity** of the workout by increasing the workload of swam meters. The time of training remained at 60 minutes but we changed the **type** of swimming activity, which had a comprehensive structure:



300m Warm-up
200m Technical drills
200m Speed training
400m Anaerobic training
200m Strength training
200m Cool down

You can see below how we used different intensity zones during one typical session. As well as maintaining where we were aerobically with 600m, we swam about 800m anaerobically and around 100m at maximum race speed.

Here's a typical session:

Aim: Freestyle – catch technique, anaerobic and strength swimming
Swim aids: pull buoy, paddles, fins

Warm up:

300m alternating:

- 1. ↑ 50m freestyle kick*
- 2. ↓ 50m freestyle with pull buoy breathing every 5th stroke*

3x sink downs focusing on a smooth exhalation

Main set:

8x 100m alternating

- 1. Strength paddles – 25m Scull #1 into 75m freestyle with pull buoy - accelerating!*
- 2. 75m easy freestyle into 25m sprint at maximum speed!*

8x 50m fins ↑ fly kick ↓ freestyle (starting every 1 minute)

Cool down:

100m Backstroke

Total: 1600 m

You may be thinking 1600m once per week isn't very much training and you're right! It is very little compared to other swimmers but our work and family responsibilities did not allow us to do more, so we were even more focused on the quality and comprehensiveness in every sessions.

Other Important Parts Of Our Training

Our previous training was mainly based around stroke development but when training for Russia 2015 we introduced many other components of preparation. Are they also in your preparation? Perhaps they should be! :

As well as improving technique, speed, strength and endurance we did not forget about recovery/regeneration, practicing tactics, psychological preparation and use of other techniques, such as visualization.

Focus

An advantage of swimming a low number of sessions was that it also allowed us to go into each workout fresh, with a high commitment and personal focus. This was reflected mainly in the hard anaerobic/sprint parts of training. Each of the components naturally overlapped during the sessions – for instance a drill set with relatively little recovery also provides some aerobic training. This is key when you have a low training volume – making the most of every minute of your time in the water.



Mental Approach

Your mindset and focus during training is so important and so it was for Jennifer, Jana and myself. As well as a positive, motivating and friendly atmosphere we built inner motivation with a principle I call the three 'C's : **Consequence, Choice, Cooperation**:

When you're doing something challenging (or even a little bit painful!) it's really important to understand why you are doing it. Instead of an austere "just swim it" we focused on "why" it was important to meet our goal. What was the positive **consequence** of doing this set for our fitness or skill level?

Sitting alongside that, we emphasized that everyone had a **choice** of what they swam. Nobody was forced to do a particular set or bullied into it by the group. If we choose to do something hard the psychological benefits to our self esteem, motivation and confidence are profound, way beyond being forced to do something.

*"Do not count on tomorrow. Do not rely even on today.
Rely on this moment, for this one moment. "
Sri Chinmoy*

Lastly, we developed **cooperation** in our group by giving mutual feedback, sharing feelings and offering each other moral support. Getting a nurturing positive atmosphere in your 'support team' like this hugely increases your chances of success as you ride the ups and downs of training and your wider life.

A typical introduction using the Three C's might be: *Today's session is focused on the catch phase. For that we will swim 100m of the sculling drill and if you feel it works better for you, you can use paddles. The more advanced can swim 150m. All concentrate on a high and firm wrist with the fingers held lightly together. I will keep you all corrected and after the swim we discuss how we did.*

This approach combined with creating a friendly atmosphere increases the effectiveness of your training several times over. Especially by allowing the conscious implementation of the skill instead of swimming without thinking.

For Real Success You Need To Think. So Use Your Head!

If we have a "get it over with as soon as possible" attitude to training we are not truly present in our body or soul. If we don't think why, how and what we are doing then training is only 20% effective. When we are fully present and focused we can achieve just as much with fewer workouts. You can look at this using the pareto principle (the 80-20 rule) and recognise that 80% of what you achieve comes from 20% of what you do – you just need to do the right 20%!

The 80-20 rule can be applied in any activity and sports training including the mental side. Realising where you need to be mentally to be at your best and getting yourself into that state is an important skill of 'mind management'. The most successful Czech long-distance swimmer [Abhejali Bernardová](#) is known for this spiritual approach to training the mind using meditation techniques. She's the only Czech swimmer to achieve the Triple Crown by overcoming the 33km Straits between Los Angeles and Santa island, swimming the 34km English Channel and 46km around Manhattan Island!



The Power Of Visualisation

In training, Jane, Jennifer and I relied a lot on visualization. Especially in our technical, tactical and psychological preparation:

Firstly we used Swim Smooth video analysis to record each other swimming and thoroughly analyse our freestyle performance. Each of us knew what we individually needed to focus on in our strokes to improve, specifically how it looked at how it should look when it was right. Importantly, we filmed this at race speed too (for us 100m sprinting).

For myself, the biggest surprise was the high position of my head when breathing:



Gabriela lifting her head a little high to breathe

And also, although I feel that my stroke is shortening towards the end of a 100m race, it actually isn't and I am still fully extending in my stroke. This has freed me up to focus more on the catch phase of the stroke and trust the push at the rear is in fact correct already.

For the 100 m freestyle we also devoted a lot of attention to improve starts, turns and the final touch. These skills play a huge role in a 25m pool and can make as much as 4 seconds difference over a 100m race.

We constantly used visualization to remind us how to focus, for example, when practicing starts we imagined that we are diving into a narrow tube to minimise drag.

We also used visualisation to improve tactical race skills such as good pacing. Our strategy was to swim the first 50m of the race easily (relatively!) and technically, then from 50-75m to swim forcefully and from 75m into the finish sprinting with maximum possible speed. We knew this gave the best overall performance and by taking a few seconds out to visualise this going well from the start to the final touch helped 'program in' success.

Finally we visualised succeeding in our goals using our imagination to experience success in our heads as graphically as possible and experiencing the emotions of that success. A great time to do that was during normal training, last thing at night before going to bed. We practiced visualising perfect technical and tactical execution of the race – and how it felt – time and time again.

The success of this 'ideomotoric training' was overwhelming. In a 25m pool after 6 months of only training once per week, Jana was swimming 1:23.6 for 100m, which is 4 seconds faster. Gabi swam 2 seconds faster at 1:09.6. Not only did we set all time personal bests in our 40s but after finishing the race we felt really good.

"I begin by imagining impossible, and I quit that I achieve impossible"
Sri Chinmoy

We were very sad to lose Jennifer from our 'team' during this training. Unfortunately she could not make the trip dates to Kazan, this was a huge shame as the challenge was her idea in the first place! We look forward to the next adventure with you Jennifer!

So How Did It All Turn Out?

At the Fina Masters World Championship after no training at all for a month during the summer holidays, we repeated the same success. In the 50m long-course pool Jana reached 23rd place in the 100m freestyle with 1:27.4 and Gabi 12th place with 1:11.6.

As I explained above, the **power of ideas** became a key building block of our entire swimming training. Everything was created and achieved thanks to having the idea of racing in Kazan. Thoughts shape our world. It is up to us whether we choose positive or negative thoughts. Whether we build barriers or bridges to reach our dreams. Everything is achievable if we really want it.

Gabi

Is it right to swim high volumes when you can achieve your goals smoothly instead? Did you get caught by the story of Jane and Gabi? Come and try the most effective Swim Smooth swimming training. Swim and train effectively "Smoothly". Choose from a range of Swim Smooth individual and group training for children and adults.

