
◆ FLEET FEET TIMES ◆

Volume 4 Issue 1

NOVEMBER 2000

The Editors Bit!

Hello again to you all. Another year at Fleet Feet is about to begin and there have been a fair few changes on the committee. We have provided a full list of committee members and you are encouraged to approach them with any moans or groans that you might have. Then again if you would like to give us a pat on the back we would like to hear about that as well.

I am afraid you have got me for another year as the Newsletter Editor. So its another year of spelling mistakes for you all to cope with. I do try and get the Newsletter out about every 6 weeks. However I can only do this if you all provide me with information and stories. It is best if you can send me this on disk or email as I then don't have to retype it. Also if you have any funny photos please send them to Nelly so they can be added to the web site.

Jim Stark has been voted back on as Chair, a job he does well, thanks Jim. Bill will be vice chair again and Graeme is the membership secretary. Thanks boys. Chris Milton is taking over as Treasurer and Glen Beck is our new secretary. Thanks have to go to Andy Rolph , who after 6 years on the committee is taking a well-earned rest. Helen Mackie has done a great job as Treasurer, thanks to you both. On a final note of thanks we must not forget our two coaches Carol and Sarah without whom none of us would have done as well as we did this year. Both coaches put in a huge amount of work behind the scenes and could do with a lot Thanks than they get. So make sure you tell them next time you see them how brilliant they are.

The committee has asked that you all be informed that Committee Meetings take place on the first Tuesday of the month at North Sea Compactors, directions from Jim Stark. Members are welcome to attend as observers. As a club we have run approximately 10 races each year and then plan is that



we will do the same this year. The dates are still to be set and we will inform you of these ASAP. The winter series races will be held on the last Sunday in February, March & April. Chrissie Gutteridge has been appointed as Race Co-ordinator, a new position within the club. She will NOT be organising the races but will be there to guide those who have offered their services to run the races. Thank you to all of you in advance. We will need our usual team of marshals, so please think about which races you wish to race and which you can help at and let the organisers know.

We are planning a big drive to get more sponsorship for our races this year. Sports Scotland will match any commercial sponsorship money we raise pound for pound. Please read the article in the newsletter.

Is team it back in demand, please read the ditty and let me know your views. I will be including a list of shops that will give FFT members discount. Drop me a note if you know of any that you think I might not know about. Please read the whole newsletter and your comments would be appreciated. And finally this will be your last newsletter if you decide not to rejoin Fleet Feet. Please do it's a great club and we would miss you.

Deadline for the next newsletter is 4th December 2000

Mo

Thanks to Stef for her articles, compulsive reading & well done Bella!

WOMEN ON WHEELS

Following last years very successful Active 8 weekends last years support has been received to hold a further 3 sessions this year.

Unfortunately the first has already taken place. However there is still plenty of time to sign up for the next two sessions which are being held on Saturday 2nd December and Saturday 10th February. Both sessions are being held at the Scout hut in Stonehaven and will run from 10AM to 4PM.

At both there will be a choice of a road or turbo session, allowing everyone to be catered for and also allowing for adverse weather conditions should they arise. On the 2nd December there will be a session on bike maintenance, whilst the talk in February will be based on tips and hints for getting the most out of your cycling over the summer season. There will also be a chance to get advice on hydration and nutrition, both on and off the bike.

Injury prevention will also be covered. Sarah Phillips will be taking the sessions. The cost for the sessions at Stonehaven is £5 per session. Application forms can be obtained from Andrew Miller on Tel: 01467 628127. Thanks have to go to McIntosh Plant Hire, sports Match and Aberdeenshire Council for their support in holding the sessions.

If you are new to cycling or wanting to start out these are great sessions to get you started. All levels of ability attend and everyone is very supportive and encouraging. You will pick up lots of hints on what is best to buy, wear or not to wear and all in all it's a great day that I can thoroughly recommend.

FLEET FEET TRIATHLETES

COMMITTEE MEMBERS – Year 2001

<u>Chairman</u>	Jim Stark Fetteresso Lodge 9 Bath Street Stonehaven AB39 2DH	Tel: (01224) 248455 [day] (01569) 764675 [eve] Fax: (01224) 248454 [day] (01569) 764675 [eve] E-mail: nscompac@netcomuk.co.uk
<u>Vice Chair</u>	Bill Roney 7 Castle Street Stonehaven AB39 2PA	Tel: (01569) 763439 [eve] E-mail: bill.roney@smit-scotland.com
<u>Secretary</u>	Glen Beck 13 Bernham Cres. Stonehaven AB39 2WQ	Tel: (01569) 765313 [eve] (01224) 647770 [day] E-mail: glennb@p1-ltd.com
<u>Treasurer</u>	Chris Milton Drumeltie Cottage Auchenblae Aberdeenshire AB30 1TZ	Tel: (01561) 320310 [eve] (01224) 741400 [day] E-mail: cmilton@brovig-rds.com
<u>Membership Secretary</u>	Graeme James 54 Binghill Cres. Milltimber Aberdeen AB13 0HP	Tel: (01224) 733095 [eve] (01224) 744044(day) E-mail: catbeam@jameshqfreeserve.co.uk
<u>Events Co-ordinator</u>	Chrissie Gutteridge 21 School Road Stonehaven AB39 2FB	Tel: (01569) 766384 [eve] E-mail: curvychrissi@genie.co.uk
<u>Coach</u>	Carol McLaren 74 High Street Stonehaven AB39 2JQ	Tel: (01569) 763924 [eve] (01330) 824870 [day] E-mail: cmclaren.lr@aberdeenshire.gov.uk
<u>Newsletter/ Sponsorship</u>	Mo Howard 12 Queens Road Stonehaven AB39 2HQ	Tel: (01569) 767190 [eve] E-mail: DrDHoward@aol.com
<u>Equipment</u>	Bert McIntosh Morven View Banchory AB31 4HD	Tel: (01330) 844633 [eve] (01330) 860751 [day] E-mail: bert@mphltd.co.uk

FLEET FEET KIT

It has now been several years since we have provided any Club Kit and I have been making some tentative enquires about ordering some. However I need some feedback from you the masses if it is worth my while getting further information. To date I have prices for sweatshirts (childrens as well), lycra running bottoms and tracksters. Do you want me to find out about racekit as well??

The sweatshirts would cost about £10 -£15 depending on the number ordered, the lycra tights approximately £15 and the tracksters approx. £10.

If you are interested in kit or have any further suggestions or enquires please email, phone or write to me to let me know. I will then make further enquires and get back to those interested. Please contact me by the end of November and this should give plenty of time to be organised to put in an order after Christmas.

My email is: DrDHoward@aol.com

Phone number: 01569 767190

Address: Mo Howard, 12 Queens Road, Stonehaven

CLUB SPONSORSHIP

As you will all be aware we at Fleet Feet organise about 10 races each year. This year we are looking to try and get sponsorship for some, if not all of our races.

Last year the Bervie Chipper sponsored the refreshments at the Summer Series and we are hoping that they will be able to do the same this year.

What I am hoping to arrange is a main sponsor for each race or several sponsors donating smaller amounts.

If this can be arranged we will be able to increase the profile of the events, give better giveaways and also provide better prizes.

However I cannot manage to do this on my own, so I need your help. There are many of you out there who may have the opportunity to gain sponsorship for the club through your work. We are not looking for a huge amount of money, but somewhere in the region of £400 per race or £500 for the winter and summer series. If you can provide me with a name then I will do the rest. If you can make the initial contact even better.

If you can come up with the money without me that's even better.

Sport Scotland will match any commercial sponsorship pound for pound that we can raise, but this is for the first year only.

An informed source has told me that club sponsorship nearly always starts within the club, so please put on your thinking caps and help me here. **HELP PLEASE THESE ARE YOR RACES !!!!!**

I look forward to getting lots of replies.

Mo

IMPORTANT PLEASE READ

Fleet Feet Committee are proposing that a fixed amount (~ £1000?) be set aside this year to help those members of the club who will be attending National Training Camps in this country and abroad. There will be a maximum put on each application and once the set amount has been allocated that will be it for this financial year.

The committee want your opinion, so please forward any comments to **Jim Stark - Chairperson.**

YOUR IDEAS ARE NEEDED

A number of suggestions have been made as to how to use some of the club funds. The following suggestions have been made:

- . Club Stencil kit + stock
- . Club shop, energy bars, inner tubes etc.
- . Junior day for kids
- . Flippers for swimming

The committee are open to ideas but we need someone who is willing to implement and run them. Have you any ideas and can you help??

Comments and offer to the Ed. or any committee member.

FFT TRAINING SESSIONS

Monday:

Swim session 7AM-8AM Stonehaven Leisure Centre. Cost £1.70

Circuit Training Green Hut 7 PM. Short run & circuits. Coach: Carol McLaren Cost £1.50 members, £3 non members.

Tuesday:

Run Session with S&D, 7PM, coached by Carol, cost £2.90(includes swim)

Coached swim session with Carol 8.15PM, cost £1.90.Stonehaven Leisure Centre.

Wednesday:

Turbo Training, 7PM, Green Hut, Stonehaven. Coach: Sarah Phillips.

Cost £1.50 members. £3 non members

Thursday:

Run session, Leisure Centre, cost £2.90, includes swim. Coach Carol.

Saturday:

Run session, Fetteresso Woods, off road 3m+, 9AM sharp.

Sunday:

Cycle, Stonehaven Square, 9 AM sharp.

If you have any queries about the sessions or your training please speak to the coaches at the sessions. They are happy to speak to you at others mutually convenient times. However a charge maybe made for this.

SWIM SESSIONS

The start time of the Tuesday night swim session has changed. Please arrive and be ready to start stretching by 8.15PM. We will be stretching for about 15mins prior to the start of the session. The aim of this is to increase persuade our bodies to become slightly more flexible and this in turn should allow for a better swim stroke and faster times.

We will then start swimming at 8.30 PM prompt and will run until 10PM.

The warm up will be set as will the main set, but each person will have their own particular technique session. This should have been set for you by your swimming partner. If you have not had your swim analysed please speak to Carol. The aim of the sessions up until Christmas is to improve your technique , so we will not be charging up and down non stop.

We will be doing some fast stuff by way of time trials but the guts of the sessions will be focused on style and how to Improve it.

NOTICEBOARD

Private adverts welcome free of charge. Business adverts £5 ¼ page ,
£7.50 for ½ page. Contact: The Ed. Tel: 01569 767190

Club Equipment To Hire & Borrow

The club has the following items that maybe borrowed free of charge: Bike Stand, Aqua Jogger, Tool Kit

Bike bags and boxes are also available for hire at a cost of £10/week, £5/4 days, and £2/day.

Contact : Jim Stark
Tel: 01569 764675

Club members are asked to note that Club Members on International Duties will take priority. It is their duty to ensure that they make their booking 28days in advance. This booking will then take priority over any booking previously made.
The FFT Committee has taken this decision.

FLEET FEET WEB SITE: Our web site has now been up and running for almost a year now and our thanks must go to Nelly Shand for his on going hard work. It provides up to date information on what is happening in the club and you can print off entry forms for all of our races. It is also a useful source for links to other triathlon sites and clubs. Lookout for the flashing star and click on it. You never know who you might see. The site can be accessed from the web address below.

www.fleetfeet-tri.co.uk

Yearly Report from your Honourable Membership Secretary

Following on from the AGM this month, please find the relevant points noted at the meeting for your general information. If you do not already know, I have been voted back in for the forthcoming year for my sins and will hopefully continue to keep you legal with membership cards and up to date with mailing lists etc.

Membership levels have been steady as you will see from the notes, where you all hide I do not know, seeing as only 25% appeared at the AGM I assume you must all be out training! The website has been very successful, as you will all know, in giving out up-to-date information and promoting the club, and I have received many calls and emails from would be members. This is encouraging as new faces are always welcome, every member should buy that Nelly character a beer for his good work (it may slow him down with a bit of luck so we can catch him up!)

Looking at the past years database has produced some interesting figures in the age groups, as you will see. Who says you need to be young and fancy free to have some fun in what is considered as a tough sport.

The new membership starts as of 1st November, so I will be waiting with baited breath for the flood of newly filled in forms. Neat writing or printing please, as you would not believe the handwriting of some people, especially in the cases of e-mail addresses.

Thanks folks.....

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The girls go on tour to Aberfeldy.

Great freedom for a whole weekend!! Somehow when I get a weekend pass I don't head for the big smoke a go on a spending spree I seem to opt for a weekend of training and early mornings. But lets face it when you want to get better it's the only way to go.

The annual Ladies Only Triathlon Training Weekend was held again this year from the 28th to 29th October. Fleet Feet ladies were there in force and we all had a brilliant time.

The day started rather early on Saturday, as we had to be in Aberfeldy for 9.30 AM for the first swim session starting at 10 AM. After 1 ½ hrs of swimming when the majority of us found that we were not as brilliant as we thought and the ones who thought they were not found they were better and Fiona Rice was as brilliant as ever we hauled ourselves out of the pool and set about eating as many calories as possible to see us through the afternoon. The food there is great. Yum yum.

The afternoon followed with Fiona Lothian giving us a talk and practical session on Running Biomechanics, followed by Core Stability and Strength Work. Apparently we, that is the girls on the weekend are better at the core strength work than the Scottish Squad !! It is apparently down to the hours of aerobics that we all did prior to becoming "Triathletes" At least I did something right in my earlier life.

Now totally shattered we headed out on a bike session. It should have been renamed a survival sessions as the heavens opened and one FFT persons was heard to mutter. "I am almost 40 yrs old, why am I out here in this. I could be at home with a gin and tonic!"

Having perfected hills, cornering and coming back soaked, exhilarated and knackered we arrived back at the centre. Having been revived by a cup of tea and another yummy homebake we watched a swim video on "Total Immersion Theory" This is a new technique that has been thought up by someone in America and looked impossible. We were then told that that was going to be the core of the morning swim session on Sunday.

Oh well, time for more food and a glass or two of wine, or beer and crisps. Has to be done really. After all the coaches on the course normally are not allowed to have any treats when they are training the Scottish Squad, so its really only fair to let them have a good time this weekend.

Having selected the least wobbly bunk beds, eaten our fill and had a strenuous game of table tennis the town of Aberfeldy beckoned.

Sunday dawned too early, still wet and windy. We headed for the pool and put the theory into practise which for a lot of us meant taking in a lot of water and finding that all is not as easy as it looks! Breakfast, yum yum and then a talk on planning your winter training.

We then had a run session. Aberfeldy is very hilly and if you think hill reps on Woodcot Brae are bad don't go and live in Aberfeldy. After another hard session we had to top up our energy levels once again. The transition practise had to be abandoned as it was so wet and instead we put time to good use learning a bit about bike maintenance. Which involved getting very dirty, yes we all vowed to clean our bikes and finding out that it is actually easier than it looks. But I still feel it's a job that Dave really does better. Sorry.

8 inspired and weary Fleet Feeters loaded themselves, bikes and huge kit bags into the cars and headed for home at the end of a great weekend. Thanks must go to the coaches who put us through hell and will have hopefully improved our techniques in all three disciplines. Thanks to Fiona Lothian, Carol McLaren and Stuart McKinnon. It was great.

We have been promised another weekend in April so if you want to go look out for dates in the STA newsletter or in the FFT Times. But book your massage for when you get home, you will need it.

I know there will be a few of you out there thinking why should the girls get there own weekends and we don't. Well why don't you write and ask or arrange one for yourselves in Stonehaven. Or you could have a sex change and come on the one in April!

Mo

SYDNEY OLYMPICS

My Olympic adventure really began back in 1998 when I started racing on the World Cup circuit. After two and a half, exhausting but enlightening, years of travelling the globe in search of vital World ranking points, my qualification for Sydney was confirmed in May this year. At this stage my life progressed from the full to the overflowing. Trying to find time in my already busy schedule to cope with the many new demands that come with Olympic selection, had the effect of eliminating any remaining normality from my life! I was glad of opportunities to

get away from home base, particularly the Scottish camp in the Pyrennes, where I could focus solely on training without constant interruption. Despite the increased demands on my time, my preparation for the Games over the final months went quite well, and I was happy with my training and racing form when I left for Australia three weeks out from the big one.

The British team used the secluded Radisson Hotel on the Gold Coast as their base prior to the start of the Games. This provided a place where the athletes could overcome their jet lag, undertake final preparations in a well organised and well supported environment, and collect their 27kg of team kit! A majority of the sports made use of this facility and at its peak the British team took over the entire hotel with over 300 athletes and officials. I headed to the Gold Coast after racing the ETU Cup race in Geneva at the end of August, and stayed until the Tuesday before the Olympic race. Like most athletes, I was totally impressed with both the set-up at the Radisson and the Gold Coast as a training environment.

The Tuesday prior to our race the womens squad and triathlon support staff flew down to Sydney. Before the race we stayed in apartments close to the city centre, principally to avoid the significant journey between the Olympic village and the Opera House, to provide a quieter environment for final preparations, and to be closer to the training facilities. Wednesday started at the Opera House with the race briefing and the pontoon draw. The pontoon draw was blind for the top 15 athletes, which meant that although I had about 6th pick of pontoon position I had no idea where the athletes above me had chosen. This was the first time that this system had been used and provided to be a disadvantage to the top athletes. This was followed by the official swim practice, where we were able to remind ourselves just how choppy Sydney harbour is (and avoid the jelly fish). Thursday and Friday were spent going through final race preparations and trying to remain as calm as possible!

I endeavoured to treat the build up to this race like any other World Cup, and on the whole I succeeded. The only time the enormity of the occasion threatened to get the better of me was for a very brief spell while watching the opening ceremony on TV, but the rapid heart beat syndrome didn't last long! On race day I stuck to my usual routine and reached the start line quite relaxed and focussed. The only significant difference between this race and a World Cup being that we had to clear the water 15 minutes earlier, 30 minutes before race start, and gather in a holding tent beneath the Opera House steps in preparation for being introduced to the crowd. There were some very interesting and entertaining methods of trying to appear calm being demonstrated in that tent!

Onto the race itself, and I'll start by apologising to all those who stayed up half the night only to observe my absence from the heat of the action! I didn't have the best of races. The swim started quite well, but I suffered over the later stages and came out of the water towards the back of the 2nd pack. This was followed by a nightmare transition which saw me exit on the bike in a lowly 43rd position, behind the 3rd pack, and with the realisation that my race was already over in terms of medals. I quickly caught the 3rd pack but then had little option but to watch in frustration as the two front packs gradually pulled away. I hopped off the bike 4 minutes down on the leaders and 2 minutes down on the next pack. I ran quite strongly and managed to pull back several places to finish a disappointing 15th. However, the atmosphere throughout the race was absolutely fantastic. The entire course was packed, with the best part of 200,000 spectators, including significant British and Scottish contingents, who were all highly vocal and supportive.

Despite my poor performance, I am a big fan of the Sydney course. I believe that it is challenging from start to finish and a good test of the true triathlete. The water in Sydney harbour is always choppy and turbulent, the bike course is very rhythm breaking with the constant uphill, downhill and cornering, while the run course requires a range

of skills including long flat sections, short steep uphill and the long gradual descents. There really is no place to hide, and it is those with the fewest weaknesses (and can get their wetsuits off) that rise to the top.

I had very mixed emotions on crossing the finishing line. I was obviously disappointed with my own performance, which based on final outcome, was my worst result of the year. I also felt relief that it was over, and that my life could regain some sort of normality (in hindsight that was merely wishful thinking!). I was happy both at the realisation of how lucky I was to have played a part in such a great occasion, and that the race had been an excellent advert for triathlon and hopefully attracted many new fans worldwide.

After an equally as exciting mens race the following day, the triathlon team moved into the extremely busy Olympic village. The village was home to 10,000 athletes and consisted of street upon street of purpose built housing. Some of the housing was temporary, however much was permanent and post Games will form Sydney's newest suburb. I am a little surprised that any Australian would want to live in these houses given how packed in, small and regular they were, compared to the large spacious and individual nature of most Australian housing. I guess that there was more than one "Ian Thorpes bedroom" claim to help in the sales! I was sharing with Michelle Dillon in a house full of the swimming coaches and officials. Needless to say it was a fairly quiet house, and a fairly depressing one by the end of the week as the British swimmers faired about as well as the triathletes! Apart from the street upon street of identical housing the village had two large 24 hour free eating houses, a 24 hour gymnasium, shops, free massage, a library and a constant shuttle bus taking you from one end to the other (around a mile). There was also one 400 metre grass oval, which served as the main running venue and was constantly packed. Training options in and around the village were minimal, so much of my time was spent in the dining halls eating and chatting, star spotting (Haile Gebrselassie is far better runner than he is a pool player!), or picking up whatever free tickets were available from the British headquarters. After 5 days in the village I'd seen enough famous people, eaten enough junk food and sat on my arse for quite long enough. I was getting bored and wanted to go home, to catch up with friends and start planning the rest of my life. So I changed my flights and flew home a week after my race.

Although triathlon may appear to be an individual sport, I believe that nothing could be further from the truth. I see it is a team effort in which the athlete has the plum job of being the one that actually gets out to play. I wouldn't have achieved the results I have, nor would I have been at the Olympics, if it wasn't for the help and support of a great many people. This includes everyone who buy's lottery tickets and thereby contributes to my income, those who sent me good luck messages, my family and friends who support me on a daily basis (which I know wasn't too easy on the final run in) and everyone in between. I guess that Darren Smith may have had the worst job, having to put up with both the best and worst of me throughout the holding camp and Olympics! To all these people I would like to say thanks.

WORLD DUATHLON CHAMPIONSHIPS

The World Duathlon Championships were not part of my race schedule at the start of this season, nor were they part of my race schedule three weeks earlier in Sydney, and nor were they part my plans the weekend before Calais! I arrived home from the Olympics fairly frustrated by my performance and having spent the previous week

doing nothing but eating chocolate cake and pizza. Back on home soil, I was keen to get back into a bit of easy and enjoyable training. With my training partner, Bella, in serious preparation for Calais I decided it would be cool to keep her company in her final two weeks of training. The emphasis for me was just to have fun, nothing too serious, and generally to cruise along until I blew up (which didn't take very long most days). The weekend before Calais I organised an invitation only mini-duathlon to help Bella prepare and joined in the star-studded line up of four (Bellstar, Thunder Thighs, Jelly Belly and Sumo Queen – the other invited competitors took the big girls blouse option!). In short, I had enough fun in that race that the process of persuading me to compete in Calais, by our (big girls blouse of a) national coach, was made relatively easy! So on Monday I committed to racing, and had two hectic days to sort out my entry, travel and accommodation details plus fit in all the quality training that I felt was necessary to get me back into some sort of race shape.

I arrived in Calais on Thursday, with most of the GB team arriving around the same time. Most of us were staying at Youth Hostel which was quite a walk from the town centre, where the racing was based, and there was little reason to venture that far before the racing started. So I spent most of my time, before and after the race, drinking coffee and eating cakes in a small bakery across from the Youth Hostel, and there was no shortage of company!

Saturday was age group race day. There was a large contingent of British and Scottish athletes involved so I got my training done early and headed down to give them some support. The run course, which was the same for both age group and elite was very spectator friendly, and I picked a spot where you could see the competitors just about every kilometre throughout the run. The Scots, particularly the girls, raced well and it was a great buzz to see Bella storm away to win her age group by over 3 minutes and to be the fastest female age grouper by over two minutes, a performance that resulted in our national coach having to “go purple”. I'm not sure if it was out of sympathy or boredom that I decided to join him. There was also another great victory for Joyce. The rest of the Scottish contingent had mixed fortunes, but generally enjoyed the course and the experience.

Sunday was junior and elite day. The junior girls were first off and had the roughest deal with torrential rain for much of their race. Lesley seemed to be quite at home in the rain and had a great day to finish second behind Nicola Spirig. We were off next, and thankfully the rain stopped just in time although the roads were still very wet and the wind had started to pick up. My race plan was to go out and have fun, which doesn't sound too professional for a professional athlete! I'll attempt to redeem myself by saying that I had spent more time than usual working through the different race scenarios, due mainly to my uncertainty as to how the race was likely to go. I had not raced against most of the duathletes before and therefore did not have first hand knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses. I know Siri Lindley very well from the triathlon circuit, and obviously I know Fiona, but the rest I really wasn't too sure about.

The first run went roughly to plan: hard but not flat out and we were down to six by the end. The bike was seven laps of a flat but windy circuit. I found it quite hard going, particularly after falling off at the end of the second lap and having to hop back on and chase for the next 5 km to rejoin the lead group. We did not work well together with Imra Heeren doing most of the work (she had also seemed happy to lead for most of the first run!), but still pulled away from the rest of the field apart from the German, Soeder, who biked strongly to catch us. We came into the second transition as a group of seven. The five duathletes shot through transition with their platform pedals, whereas the two triathletes (Siri and myself) lost time as we swapped from cycling to running shoes and left transition in 6th and 7th spots, having lost about 20 seconds to Fiona who was first out onto the final run. I caught Siri and the two of us gradually picked off the five runners in front. We finally caught Fiona last at around 2km, and the three of us ran together until around the 3.5km mark and from the sounds of things we were all suffering just a bit! Not being the best of sprinters, it had always been in my race plan to kick from a long way out, so with about 1.5 km to go I moved into

my third (?) and final gear and hit the front and kept my eyes fixed on the road ahead. I knew Siri wasn't far behind, but with the crowd really behind me I kept the pace high enough to eliminate a sprint finish and held on to win.

To be honest, my first emotion on crossing the line was surprise that nobody had sprinted past me with 20m to go – as has happened so often in the past. Thereafter, it was a great feeling to have won a World title, particularly in such a tight and exciting race. I owe much of my victory to the tremendous support I received throughout the race, and particularly over the last kilometre. My only disappointment was seeing Fiona pipped to the bronze medal by the German, Soeder.

Although winning the World Duathlon title did not make up for the disappointment of Sydney, it certainly put me in a much better frame of mind in which to end the season. I guess I'd better have the World Duathlon Championships on my race schedule from the start next season!

Many thanks to Stef for the above, great reading. Thanks for taking the time to tell us all at Fleet Feet your news. Have a good winter training down under. We will think of you as we slog it up the Slug in the rain and snow.

Edwards / Clyne FASTrac Session 27th January 2001

With winter just round the corner how does this tickle your fancy!!

On Saturday 27th January 2001 the two racing pre-sixties swingers are willing to come along and pass on their running skills to club members or indeed interested athletes from any club or town.

To assist me arranging accommodation for the day can you by Saturday 25th November 2000 show interest or not, there will be a token charge of ?2.50 per head.

The format being as and includes: -

9.30am Doors open - coffee / tea and mini yums
10.00am Introduction - over to Mel / Fraser
12.00 - 1.00pm Outdoor session Mineralwell, Harbour or Woodcot Brae??
 depending on weather
 Soup / Sandwiches - tea / coffee or light drinks
1.45pm - 3pm Slides more talks / tips followed by 1/2 hour questions

A full detail of the session will be provided before Christmas.

Who can believe its Christmas again, sorry can't arrange creche services.

Bert McIntosh
Tel.: (01330) 860751 - day Tel.: (01330) 844633 - night
Fax: (01330) 860749
email: bert@mphltd.co.uk
Verbally

Total Immersion Swimming – “You Can Teach Talent”

By Ian Smith, FISTC, Loughborough.

Having recently returned from a week long Total Immersion (T.I.) Coaching Workshop, at the State University of New York, New Paltz, USA, I am so inspired by what I saw there I decided I must share my experiences with everyone and explain why T.I. is, to my mind, the best thing that’s currently happening in swim teaching/coaching. I attended the workshop as one of several ‘coaching interns’ who were there to study under the tutelage of Coach Terry Laughlin. This was a kids summer swim camp which doubled as an instructional week for those of us enrolled on the Coach Training Program. I am one of only three people in the UK who are privileged to be part of this program.

First some food for thought!

Before talking about the workshop I would first ask you to put on your thinking caps and consider your current situation. Whilst this applies to Swimmers, Swimming Teachers, and Swim Coaches alike, I am primarily approaching this from the coaching perspective so if you are currently working on the poolside in any sort of coaching capacity, either qualified or unqualified; paid or unpaid & voluntary, this is really aimed at you.

I’m pretty certain the vast majority of Swim Coaches in the UK find themselves in a similar situation to myself: that is, they have a limited amount of water time available to them coupled with a finite pool of swimmers to select a team from (and most of those, sadly, having very limited talent - at least on the face of it).

The dilemma for us coaches is just how to make the best possible use of the inadequate water time and do the best job possible for the swimmers. No doubt most of us have been on numerous courses & seminars, scanned through many thousand written words in textbooks or magazines, perhaps you’ve discussed training matters with your more experienced peers (at least those willing to share their wisdom with you!) or you may even have surfed the internet - and all in the search for that little piece of magic that’s going to make all the difference for your team of swimmers.

Hands up now if you think the answer is to follow the same kind of training program employed by our top Coaches in training their elite protégées – even if in cut down form. How many of us have gone down the route of trying to be as scientific as possible by devising fiendish sets of work for your swimmers to follow that ensure they get just the right amount & type of training at just the right time in the training cycle to get them to their physical and mental peak in time for that important event? I know I’ve tried that approach in the belief that by being methodical & scientific about it my swimmers were sure to

improve and be successful. Unfortunately the results have often not been what I would have hoped for: clearly such an approach does not seem to work well for the vast majority of swimmers, and those it does work for are the gifted few who have what we like to call ‘natural talent’.

As an example - and I’m sure this will be familiar to most of you - a couple of years back I had a swimmer in the squad, Krishnan, who, for a fourteen year old, was very tall, slim and athletic with very long arms & legs. He also had hands & feet like dinner plates. To complement his physical attributes Krishnan had by far the best stroke mechanics of any swimmer I’ve coached on a regular basis: he was, by nature, so smooth and efficient he seemed to move through the water with majestic ease – particularly when swimming in breaststroke. In truth this young man had ‘natural talent’. However, Krishnan disliked training and he really did not enjoy it when we were ‘doing the hard stuff’. Consequently he rarely turned up and when he did make an appearance he rarely managed to complete a full set of work: he’d be puffing & blowing after a few hundred metres of even moderate swimming, taking much more rest than was programmed. Nevertheless, when he was swimming in an event he would simply get in and blow most competitors away without breaking sweat, even when asked to swim over-age, and everyone would comment on how beautiful his stroke was (unfortunately he has since quit swimming altogether).

If you now consider the fact that water is something like a thousand times thicker than air you really should not be that surprised when you see many of your swimmers getting nowhere fast when they try to swim at maximum speed.

This is mainly because there are only two things that are instinctive to the average person when you put them in the water: firstly they will try to keep their head clear of the water as much as possible, and secondly, to try and move faster they ‘just know’ they have to turn their arms over as fast as possible & kick like maniacs. Unfortunately both of these things will actually stop a swimmer from moving forwards quickly, let alone efficiently – especially when both are done in unison.

So, to understand why Krishnan could be relatively quick with so little training - in comparison with many of his peers who were training harder and more often – you just have to compare him with the elite swimmers in the world who, like him, have the ability to move through the water with grace, ease and fluency.

What Krishnan did so well was he moved through the water without fighting with it. And, although his stroke rate was never high his stroke length was, and this was his this natural way of swimming. In fact he always looked very lazy when swimming at his best. Compare this to some of the fastest in the world and there lies the answer.

The fastest swimmers in the world tend to have the best stroke length and the lowest stroke rate, and this is supported by plenty of empirical evidence. Top swimmers also tend to look like they are in harmony with the water, rather than fighting with it. I suggest you should try looking for those things in your swimmers. I'm guessing you will see little of those positive features in most of them, so your first priority should be to get them to look like those elite swimmers every minute they are in the water. Understandably you may now be thinking: "hang on a minute, they are the elite and my swimmers just don't have that kind of talent?" The simple fact is talent is teachable - I know I've seen it done - you just need to learn how to teach it. And this was exactly what I learnt to do during my week with Terry & his team of Coaches in New Paltz, and so could you.

Summer Camp - Day One

After completing the usual formalities of registration and introductions, the kids got into the pool for their first session. First off they all swam a 100-yard Individual Medley that was video taped with underwater cameras for stroke analysis purposes. It immediately became apparent that this group were representative of a typical age group squad in terms of the mix of their abilities and 'styles' – there were some dreadful strokes!

Next they swam a timed 50-yard Freestyle during which their strokes were counted & recorded: times & stroke counts were added together to obtain their starting 'Swim Golf' scores. They were next organised into lane & swim orders based on their Golf scores (the lower the score the more competent the swimmer tends to be). They were each then issued with the one and only essential 'pool-tool', a pair of fistglove® stroke trainers: when worn the fistgloves prevent a swimmer from using their hands to muscle their way through the water. The rest of the session was used to introduce them to some of the technique basics and verbal cues that they would encounter during the week. They also received an introduction to the first skill that needs to be mastered, i.e. balance.

If a swimmer learns to be balanced and comfortable in the water he/she can learn the other skills faster and will move through the water without fighting with it and wasting energy – balance skills need to be practiced until they become second nature.

Days Two to Five

The format for the next four days was structured towards the swimmers learning the necessary swimming skills as quickly and easily as possible. Each day consisted of a morning session, working on the long-axis strokes of free & back; and an afternoon session, working on the short-axis strokes of fly & breast. Before each pool session there was a briefing with the swimmers by Terry. They were shown videotape of the drills that they were going to learn

and invited to participate in the discussion to ensure they knew exactly what they were going to be doing and, importantly, why (each swimmers was expected to participate fully in their own development).

Once in the pool they worked pretty much at their own pace. They never swam more than 25-yard repeats and the progressions were only made when the swimmers were showing mastery of the skill they were currently working on – obviously some got it quicker than others, however the drills are fairly straight forward so they were all able to make the progressions in a timely fashion. At first the most difficult task was getting them to slow down: as they were so used to ‘training’ at a high pace. But by the end of the four days I was truly amazed by the sight of 40 plus kids all moving up and down the pool with grace, ease and flow. And in all four strokes...!

The secret to making such swift progress is to ensure the right skills are taught first. There are four easy steps to the process, as follows:

1. **Balance:** As I’ve already indicated this is the corner stone for everything that follows so it must be learnt until it becomes a *‘no-brainer’*.
2. **Rotation of the core body:** Rotation along the long-axis is the basis for fluent free and back. Rhythmic short-axis ‘Body Dolphins’ are the key to fluent fly and breast. These rotational skills are developed until they provide the power and rhythm for the stroke. Rotational skills need to be practiced until they can be done in a fluent and effortless manner.
3. **Becoming ‘Slippery’:** The most slippery positions are, for long-axis swimming – long, sleek and side lying; and for short-axis swimming – long, sleek, and just under the surface of the water. These positions are not going to be natural or instinctive to a swimmer so have to be taught, but once learnt to perfection the swimmers do not need to use so much power or effort to swim.
4. **Propulsion:** This is the last thing taught to a swimmer and is only introduced once the earlier skills are becoming habitual. The object is to link the propulsive actions of the arms and legs to the long, balanced, slippery and effortlessly rotating core body (this is where the fistgloves come into their own in preventing the hands from taking over as the power source for the long-axis strokes). Once this is achieved you can see the swimmers moving in a fluent and graceful manner.

The other significant feature of these four days was the kids received one-on-one stroke analysis sessions with the Senior Coaches where they were shown the underwater footage of themselves swimming their Medley. This meant they got the opportunity to have the major faults identified, and just as important, showed them where they were already doing things well. You would be amazed at the reactions of some of the kids. A lot of them just did not realise how poor their strokes were: they were used to seeing elite swimmers on the TV and, since their own coaches were doing little or no stroke correction with them, they just assumed they were swimming pretty much like the people they’d been watching on the TV!

Day Six

The pool session the final morning was purely for re-taping the kids 100 Medleys, to get their 'new strokes' recorded for further analysis and for posterity. Also, they swam another 50-yard timed freestyle to get their Swim Golf score for comparison with Sundays. Once this was completed the kids viewed their 'after' video with one of the Senior Coaches who pointed out where they had improved and the things to focus on in each stroke to continue their self-development post course. Whilst I would love to show everyone the before and after tapes that is clearly not possible. However the improvement in every swimmer was obvious to all, and whilst none of them were the finished article, most were well on their way towards having beautiful swimming strokes (and a few were already truly stunning). It really was like watching a pool full of Krishnans..!

However, what I can do is provide a breakdown of some of the swim golf scores for you to consider and suggest that these represent a good indication of just how much improvement was made. These are for the group of twenty-four swimmers who I was mostly involved with over the week. They ranged in age from 9 to 15 years. The lowest first day Swim Golf score for this group came from Weston with 52; the highest was Bonnie with 90. On the last day Weston posted a score of 49, representing a 6% improvement (this was in fact the lowest individual gain for this group), and Bonnie posted 71, a massive 21% improvement. The biggest and most evident improvement came from thirteen-year-old Kimmi who dropped her score from 70 down to 54, a reduction of 23% (Kimmi was also one of those swimmers whose improvement in technique was most noticeable – she had turned out to be a real star). Day one's mean average score for this group was 76 and the final day's was 66 (an overall improvement of 13%) and all 24 swimmers improved their score.

Notably these improvements were not achieved by excessive reductions in stroke rate at the expense of speed, because not one of this group swam slower on Friday than they had on Sunday: in fact most not only improved their stroke length they actually swam faster as well.

The final act of the Swim Camp was the presentation ceremony where the achievements of each swimmer were acknowledged in front of the whole group and those parents who were in attendance. I can safely say that every one of them had made substantial improvements and in only four full days in the water: they all went home with their real prize - talent.

On the very first coaches briefing Terry made a fairly bold statement that by Friday we would be wanting to take this group of swimmers home to coach as an age group team. That proved very much to be the case and it would certainly be interesting to keep them together for six months to see exactly how they would

progress on a purely T.I. based training program. Although I could not bring these swimmers home I do have my own team to work with.

Conclusions

I returned home with a clearer understanding of the techniques involved and the most important things to focus my attention on when coaching. In consequence my own swimmers are now getting 100% Total Immersion based practice sessions and seem to be thriving on it. It has been fairly simple to integrate T.I. into my program and I now know how to make the progression back to ‘training’ once the key skills are solidly ingrained in their minds (and bodies). I now know that I must not let any of my swimmers swim even one length of poor quality stroke – as this is merely practicing faults: something to be avoided at all costs. Thinking about such things as energy systems is something that will happen much later and only when they can cope with it without their stroke being affected. It is very early days yet for my team but I believe I am now making the best possible use of the pool time I have available

I have been liasing with Terry Laughlin and find he is very willing to share his ideas. So much so I have arranged for him to make the trip over to the UK to conduct a formal Coaching Seminar to tell those of you with open minds more about the principles of Total Immersion Swimming. The two-day seminar will be at Leicestershire Police Headquarters off M1 Junction 21. The costing will be £125 per delegate (including lunch and refreshments both days). There are a limited number of B & B rooms onsite at £44 per night – first come basis. So if this article has wetted your appetite for Total Immersion Swimming I need to know. The bottom line is do you want to unlock the true potential of your swimmers and have a pool full of Krishnans? If so please contact me either by post at 64 Holywell Drive, Loughborough, Leicestershire LE11 3JZ, or by e-mail at ian.smith@ntlworld.com.

N.B. If you are a swimmer and would like to attend a UK based weekend workshop (directed by one of the T.I. Senior Coaches from the States) you can also contact me. For those of you with Internet access there is also a lot of information about Total Immersion on the website at totalimmersion.net and this is well worth a visit. In particular the newsletters, *Total Swim*, contain a lot of information that is of value to swimmers and teachers/coaches alike – check out issue 4 on last years summer camps and issue 5 on coaching.