

## The 5<sup>th</sup> Stroke

For many years, butterfly, backstroke and front crawl swimmers have been utilising the dolphin kick at the start of races and off their turns, as they feel it is faster for them than simply streamlining up to the surface or using an alternating kick on free and backstroke. However, many swimmers are not skilled at the kick and prefer not to use it, as it actually makes them slower.

Even up to the Sydney Olympic games in 2000, there were a large percentage of swimmers who still had success without utilising the dolphin kick.

### **THERE HAS BEEN A MASSIVE SHIFT IN TRENDS**

After watching the recent European Short Course Championships, I can confidently say:-

*“If a swimmer cannot master the dolphin kick, they will no longer be competitive!”.*

This may seem like a bold statement and there is the possible exception of the 800/1500m free, but on the whole this is the case. Even breaststrokers must be able to perform a powerful dolphin kick during their pull outs, if they want to be successful.

The classic example, is that of a 200m Butterflyer. They will spend up to 60m underwater in a long course race, up to 120m underwater short course. So to be competitive long course, this swimmer will be spending over a quarter of the race underwater, over half if the race is short course!!

How many of us ask our swimmers to do half or even a quarter of their training using dolphin kick? How many of us programme in extensive breath holding skills every day? I certainly don't.

**We need to re-evaluate our training plans, and treat dolphin kicking as if it was a 5<sup>th</sup> stroke. I believe that a minimum of half of our kicking should be done using the dolphin kick. We need to build aerobic, anaerobic and power dolphin kicking into our programmes, in the same way we would any other stroke.**

In our role as coaches, we have to equip our swimmers with the skills to take them as far in the sport as their talent allows them to go. If we do not make this change to our training, we are preparing our swimmers to never win...scary!!

**Russ Barber**  
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