

Making Waves – Arthur Downing

In the past 2 years, I have swum a total of 4661Km.

I'll break that down for you. In 1 year, I trained 2330Km which equates to 195Km per month, which equals 50Km per week, 7Km per day, for two years. The English-French channel is just over 30Km, therefore in one week, we swim the channel 1.5 times, and in the past two years, I have swam the channel 145 times!!

To swim that much in a week demands the highest level of dedication possible. We swim 20-24 hours per week, during 10x2 or more hour sessions. As impressive as these figures may be, they are just the standard week. During the Winter season of 2003, we completed 3 weeks of 100Km, along with numerous weeks upto 80Km.

Although these awesome distances are indeed hard to do, they don't tell the whole story. The intensity of the Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday sessions is at times so high, that in the past, I have ran to the toilets to be sick, then had to be up at 4.15am the following morning, ready for another daunting 2.5hr session.

That's not it. Far from it!!

On top of all the miles in the pool, we do 45 minutes of strength training on dry land 6 times per week. All together, that amounts to over 25 hours of training, every week.

Once the doors of Ponds Forge close behind me every day, the training doesn't stop there. When competing at this level, swimming is not just a sport, it's a way of life. Every moment of every day, you are a swimmer. You must attack every area of your life like you would a training session. That means sleep, diet, fluid intake, even the people you "befriend!"

There is nothing "normal" about being an elite athlete, there are no moments of respite, no lapses. You can't afford to watch a film the night before morning training, as I know that there is no rest if you want to succeed.

The complexity of a swimmers life is mind boggling. When in the pool, we simply don't just "swim up and down." That would be like making the statement, that a footballer merely "kicks the ball!" Percentage totals of everything must be taken, including heart rates and body weight. Not only does this sport demand physical toughness but a level of planning and intelligence as great as any other sport.

Some people question this level of preparation and many people have asked me in the past: - "Don't you get bored?" "Why wake up at 4.15am four times a week?" "Missing one session wont matter!" What these people fail to realise, is that Olympic glory is far from just plain good luck and is not a normal pursuit in life. The difference between dreams and reality is pure desire and actions, every second of every day.

There are many things that I desire in life, but everyday when training, I am chasing Olympic Gold.

I love training and racing. This is what I do. This is what I am and I love being a swimmer. I love this way of life and the thing that drives me more than anything in the world, is the dream of standing on that Olympic podium, with a gold medal round my neck, watching the Union Flag raising...just for me.