

“SWIMMING HIGHS AND LOWS”

By Damon Garrison

In the sport of swimming, a swimmer can get incredibly hot and crush their times every time they swim. They are on a hot streak and that should be cherished. But what goes up will eventually balance out for a while, or that dirty word that some coaches will never say plateau. Handling the ups for a coach is basically getting out of the way and allowing the swimmer to take off. Handling the other part is a different issue. First of all I am not afraid to say the word “plateau”; it is a fact of athletics, especially in developing athletes. I don't lie to my swimmers (other than about jellyfish), so by not telling them that those are the facts of the game, I would be deceiving them. Plateaus are derived in the sport of swimming as an analogy to mountain climbing. When you climb mountains you will climb for a while, and then rest and recover at a plateau of the ascent. See, if you are climbing a huge mountain you cannot only climb and climb and climb you must rest, recover, and adjust to the altitude. You will normally do this at a plateau of the mountain. See plateaus can be a good thing. We as coaches normally use a swimmer's plateau as a time that we make adjustments to the swimmer's stroke in order to get them ready for their next ascent. Swimmers handle plateaus in two different ways: they either flat line for a while swimming just a touch better, or add a couple of seconds here and there and come out of it after a few months (yes I said months, not weeks). Or they panic and add a bunch of time for a really long time (months to years).

Reasons why a swimmer might panic:

- They feel will never come out of this funk.
- They do not remember what it felt like to improve.
- Their parents are panicking, so they feel that added pressure to improve.
- There is a big meet that is coming up and they want to do well at it.
- They are really close to a cut and want it really bad.
- Their closest competitor is on a hot streak and they feel they will never be able to go faster than them.
- Add your own here.

If you do not panic during a plateau it will only be just that a plateau. If you panic, it will become a valley or a hole that you will only dig deeper. Almost like quicksand where the more you struggle, the deeper you go.

Ways to handle a plateau:

- DON'T PANIC !!!
- Work on the things in order to come out of it
- Remember it will get better
- Remember how good it felt on the way to this plateau and work for that feeling again
- Don't over analyze how those around you are doing (they are not you)

- Parents, continue to encourage your children and show no worries be a cheerleader not judge.
- Remember this is just a step on the way to your ultimate goal!
What if I have already dug a hole, how do I get out (it is really deep)?
- Remember first of all you are going to have to begin to ascent from the bottom of the hole not the plateau. The bottom of that hole is your plateau.
- From the bottom follow the ways to handle a plateau.
- Embrace the stroke and race corrections of your coaches.
- Stay positive remember your negativity got you down here.
- You will feel as if you are starting all over.
- Remember a great many great swimmers have been down this deep and have climbed on out.
- Have fun!

Probably the greatest example I can think of a good swimmer that I saw in a hole was Amanda Beard. Amanda was on top of the swimming world in 1996 winning Gold and Silver as a young teenager in Atlanta's Olympics and disappeared from the world ranking not long after that. A three year tailspin that led her to just be struggling to make the trials in 2000, a trials most in swimming had already written her off in. But then it happened, she came out of it and got better. She made the team in 2000 and even won the bronze. She set the world record last year in the 200 breast. At the bottom of her hole, she was not even making the finals at the Social Senior Champs. When she won the bronze at the Olympics in 2000 she had not done a best time in almost 4 years. That is perseverance. And imagine how many people were looking at her during this time. Not nearly that many are looking at you, so it will be just that much easier to get out of your hole. I hope this little article helps as you get ready for your upcoming season. Good luck to all and remember to relax.