

Regional Group on



USA Swimming Webinar

Tommy Cunningham
tommyc4kingaquatics@gmail.com

Plan for the Webinar

Part 1: Background and structure

- Brief description on KING
- Group structure
- Site organization
- Regional group
- Past coaching roles
- Highlights from the 2014-2015 short course season

Part 2: Culture

- Setting up the culture
- Making it simple to go fast
- Preparing for the championship meet

Part 3: Season plan:

- Day by day
- 4 week cycles
- technique focuses



Part 1

Background and Structure



Background on KING

Established in 1966, King Aquatic Club (KING) is the premier youth sports program in the Seattle-Tacoma Metropolitan area. KING is a USA Swimming year-round competitive swim team offering high quality professional coaching and technique instruction for swimmers of all ages and abilities. As a member club of Pacific Northwest Swimming and a USA Swimming Gold Medal Club, the goal of KING is to provide every member an opportunity to improve swimming skills and achieve success at his or her level of ability. From beginners to Olympians and everyone in between, we create an environment where excellence is inevitable and fun!



Brief Summary on Group Structure

Physical Genius: Beginner level entry revolved around IKKOS as its main tool in learning elite technique in all 4 strokes.

Age Group: 8 or older. Becoming more technically efficient in all 4 strokes and developing the right mind set. Main group for our 10&under advanced athletes.

Regional: 10 or older. Working on mastering technical efficiency in all 4 strokes and developing a strong work ethic. Main group for our 10-13 year old advanced athletes.

Power: 14 or older. Working on mastering technical efficiency in all 4 strokes and developing a strong work ethic. Group is for 14 and over year old athletes looking to improve in the sport.

Senior: 13 or older. Mastering technical efficiency in all 4 strokes and developing a great work ethic. Main group for 13-15 year old advanced athletes.

National: 14 or older. Mastering technical efficiency in all 4 strokes and mastering a great work ethic. Main group for 14 and above advanced athletes.



Sites

KCAC: Practices mainly out of the King County Aquatic Center in Federal Way. They have groups from Physical Genius all the way up to the National group.

North: Practices in Mercer Island, Seattle, and Bellevue. They have groups from Physical Genius all the way up to the National group.

Kent Meridian: Practices in Kent. They have groups from Physical Genius all the way up to the Regional group.

Mount Rainier: Practices in Des Moines. They have groups Physical Genius and Age Group.

Covington: Practices in Covington. They have groups Physical Genius and Age Group.

Evergreen: Practices in Seattle. They have groups Physical Genius, Age Group, and Power group.



Regional Group

Coaches: Keith Ure, Tomas Mendez-Beck, and myself.

-Practices are typically 2 hours. 1.5 hours in the pool and 30 minutes of dryland.

-We offer 7 practices a week. We recommend 6 days a week and we try to make sure everyone comes to practice a minimum of 5 times a week.

-Combined Regional practices once a week during the short course season on Saturdays.

-86 swimmers in the Regional Group as of March 2015.



Example Practice Week for KING North Regional

Monday: 5:30-7:30pm at Seattle University Pool

Tuesday: 5:00-7:00pm at Mercer Island Beach Club

Wednesday: 5:30-7:30pm at Seattle University Pool

Thursday: 5:00-7:00pm at Mercer Island Beach Club

Friday: 5:30-7:30pm at Mercer Island Beach Club

Saturday: 6:30-8:30am at Kent Meridian Pool

Sunday: 9:30-11:00am at Newport Hills Swim Club



Past Coaching Roles

Background as a coach:

-5th year coaching for KING.

-2010-2011: Assisted in coaching the Power at the KCAC site and the Physical Genius groups at the north site.

-2011-2012: Coached the Physical Genius group at the Mt. Rainier site.

-2012-2013: Coached Age Group at the North site.

-2013-2014: Coached Regional/Age Group at the North site.

-2014-2015: Coached Regional/Power Group at the North site.



Highlights from 2014-2015 Short Course Season for the Regional Group Program

- 5 National Age Group records. 11-12 Boys 50 breast, 100 breast, 200 breast, 200 medley relay, and 400 medley relay.
- 5 Top ten nationally ranked athletes. 10 including ones from relays.
- 35 top ten nationally ranked swims. 28 top ten individual swims.
- 17 Pacific Northwest Swimming records
- 27 KING records.
- 21 Individual wins at Northwest Age Group Regional Championship.
- 93 individual top 8 swims at Northwest Age Group Regional Championship.



Part 2

Culture

Setting up the Culture

-“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.” Pete Carroll.



Culture

The culture of my Regional group revolved around these 3 things:

-Good is the enemy of great

-Character beats talent

-Improve everyday



Good is the Enemy of Great

- This is a line that opens Jim Collins Good to Great. He explains that one of the key reasons why we have so little that becomes great is because it is so easy to settle for just being pretty good.
- This applies directly to swimming especially with young swimmers. If they're content with just being good then they're not going to be great. There's always that next challenge. Recognize your accomplishments but stay hungry for that next challenge.
- I put the goal out there constantly to be the best ever. As an individual and as a group. When they ask me how to become the best ever my answer is always to do things better than anyone has ever done it before and that starts with practice.

Character Beats Talent

-With age group swimming it becomes apparent that some athletes are going to be more physically mature than others. You can see their confidence go down behind the blocks if they're next to someone that's a lot bigger than them sometimes.

-I like to tell the story of Reggie Ho who was 5'5" 135 pounds trying to walk on to the Notre Dame football team as a kicker. His determination and his work ethic lead the way for him to be part of Notre Dame's National Championship team as the kicker.

-Two 11 year old boys in my group who probably don't weigh more than 75 pounds became 2nd and 3rd in the national rankings this season because they did things right and they believed that character beats talent.



Improve Everyday

- Very simple message. If you improve everyday then you're going to be successful.
- Especially important in times when athletes are worried that they're not going to get any faster. Keeping it logical and keeping it simple with the message of improving everyday.

Leading the Culture by Example

-One of the best ways to lead is by example. Those 3 things are very important to my program so I make sure to do those 3 things by leading by example.

-Good is the enemy of great. Just because the swimmers in the group are swimming fast doesn't mean we can't get better.

-Character beats talent. Even if we don't have the best lane space or the best equipment doesn't mean we can't be the best. We swim outdoors all year long and everyone rises to the challenge.

-Improve everyday. If I don't continue to learn something new everyday then I believe the standard won't continue to be raised. I need to constantly evolve as a coach to make sure I'm providing the best opportunity for the athletes to become great.

Talking to the Group to Influence Culture

-Another good way to lead is to be vocal.

-I like to take time from practice to talk to the group as a whole to influence the culture. I got this from Sean Hutchison when I swam for him and I got to see the impact it made first hand.

-When I first started doing this most of all the kids didn't listen but some did so I continued to do it. I wasn't very good at it at first but just with anything you get better with practice. Now most of them get really excited for every talk that we have.

-Best way to get their attention is to tell a story. I would tell stories that always had something to do with one of the 3 things I was trying to get them to understand with the culture.

Making it simple to go fast

-Having a purpose for anything you do that's fast in practice.

-I usually never say just go fast on this when I explain the set unless it's pull, kick, or drill. If we are doing 15 yards fast we are trying to hit 60% of our goal 25 time. If we are doing 25s fast we are trying to hit 50% of our goal 50 time. If we are doing 50s fast we are trying to hit 50% of our goal 100 time.

-Anything fast is preparation to go a certain time.

-We do a lot of progressions of trying to hit a time then try to hit that same time at stroke count. Try to go a faster time with that stroke count then try to lower that stroke count and go that same time. And the progression continues.

Preparing for the Championship meet

-At Northwest Age Group Regional Championship in 2014 I had a hard time understanding why some would practice so well and not perform as well as they practiced. There were others in the group that were swimming out of their minds but others that couldn't put it together. This is when I realized how important the mental side of coaching was.

-Big thing being confidence. If they believe/expect themselves to swim fast then most likely they're going to swim fast. Especially if they've put in the work.

-Before this year's championship meet I wrote a couple of sentences about each one of them that qualified for the meet in front of the whole group. Mostly containing something they have done really well up to that point in practice and that if they trust in themselves they're going to swim really well.

Part 3

Season Plan

Different Day Different Practice

-Structured the week to create a balanced program where we could focus on improving everything

Monday

-5:30-7:30 at Seattle University Pool

-Start out every Monday with the same warm up. We go 10x100 @1:40 with fins going 25 underwater dolphin 75 flutter kick on their back. Then 10x50 breastwork kick @1:10 trying to be 10 kicks or less per 25.

-We would learn a new skill and work on it for about 15 minutes.

-Do a short preset for about 5-10 minutes getting their heart rates up. Something usually involving turns

-Then circuit of 1) dryland 2) fast 25s 3) IM interval training 4) Free threshold 5) Kick or breath control. About 55-65 minutes



Tuesday

-5:00-7:00 at Mercer Island Beach Club

-Dynamic stretching for 10 minutes

-Plank variations for about 6 minutes

-Stability exercises for about 12 minutes

-Pull warm up where they have to be within 1 cycle of their stroke count and they must get their body past the flags pushing off the wall. About 30 minutes

-Max speed work with 15 yards fast off the start and off the turn. About 8-12 minutes

-Strong stroke skill work going slow and trying to do the skill going fast. About 15 minutes

-Fast kick set variation. About 20-30 minutes



Wednesday

- 5:30-7:30 at Seattle University Pool
- Stability warm up. About 25 minutes
- Underwater widths. About 10 minutes
- Skill work. About 15 minutes
- Circuit. 1) dryland 2) fast 25s 3) fast broken swim or pace work 4) fast kick



Thursday

-5:00-7:00 at Mercer Island Beach Club

-Dynamic stretching for 10 minutes

-Plank variations for about 6 minutes

-Stability exercises for about 12 minutes

-Pull warm up where they have to be within 1 cycle of their stroke count and they must get their body past the flags pushing off the wall. About 30 minutes

-Max speed work with 15 yards fast off the start and off the turn. About 8-12 minutes

-Weak stroke skill work going slow and trying to do the skill going fast. About 15 minutes

-IM interval training set. About 20-30 minutes



Friday

- 5:30-7:30 at Mercer Island Beach Club
- Dryland circuit for about 25 minutes
- National group works with Regional group on the skill that we worked on during the week for about 20 minutes
- Stability warm up. About 25 minutes
- Max Speed work. About 8 minutes
- Top 10 racing. About 5 minutes
- Sprint set. About 20-30 minutes

Saturday

- 6:30-8:30am at Kent Meridian Pool
- Short warm up. About 10 minutes
- Fast kick set. About 20 minutes
- Pull set. About 20 minutes
- Speed progression set. About 10 minutes
- IM interval training or racing. About 30-45 minutes
- Something fun if time. Till the end of practice

Sunday

- Stability warm up. About 25 minutes
- Underwater widths. About 15 minutes
- Skill work. About 15 minutes
- Stroke count set. About 15 minutes
- Starts, Turns, or something fun. About 15 minutes

4 week cycles

-We learned a new skill and tried to perfect that skill on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday.

-Tuesdays were strong stroke work and Thursdays were weak stroke work.

-We would go 1 week working Free skill, 1 week working Back skill, 1 week working Breastroke skill, and 1 week Butterfly skill. We'd repeat that up until 2 weeks before the championship meet.

-Training would increase after every 4 week cycle. Every main set would increase in duration. First 4 weeks main sets were 20 minutes and circuits were 55 minutes. Next 4 weeks main sets were 25 minutes and circuits were 60 minutes. Last 4 weeks main sets were 30 minutes and circuits were 65 minutes.

-Did this through our December Championship meet. In January we started back in the middle 4 week cycle of 25 minute main sets and circuits being 60 minutes. After those 4 week we went up to 30 minute main sets and circuits being 65 minute. Last 4 weeks we improved upon the last 4 weeks by improving sendoffs, higher goals on swim sets, and a higher load on dryland.

-Goal was to have them adapt to an increase in training every 4 weeks to keep them in flux. I felt if training was always similar then they would get really good at doing the same thing all the time. Same thing all the time usually means the same results

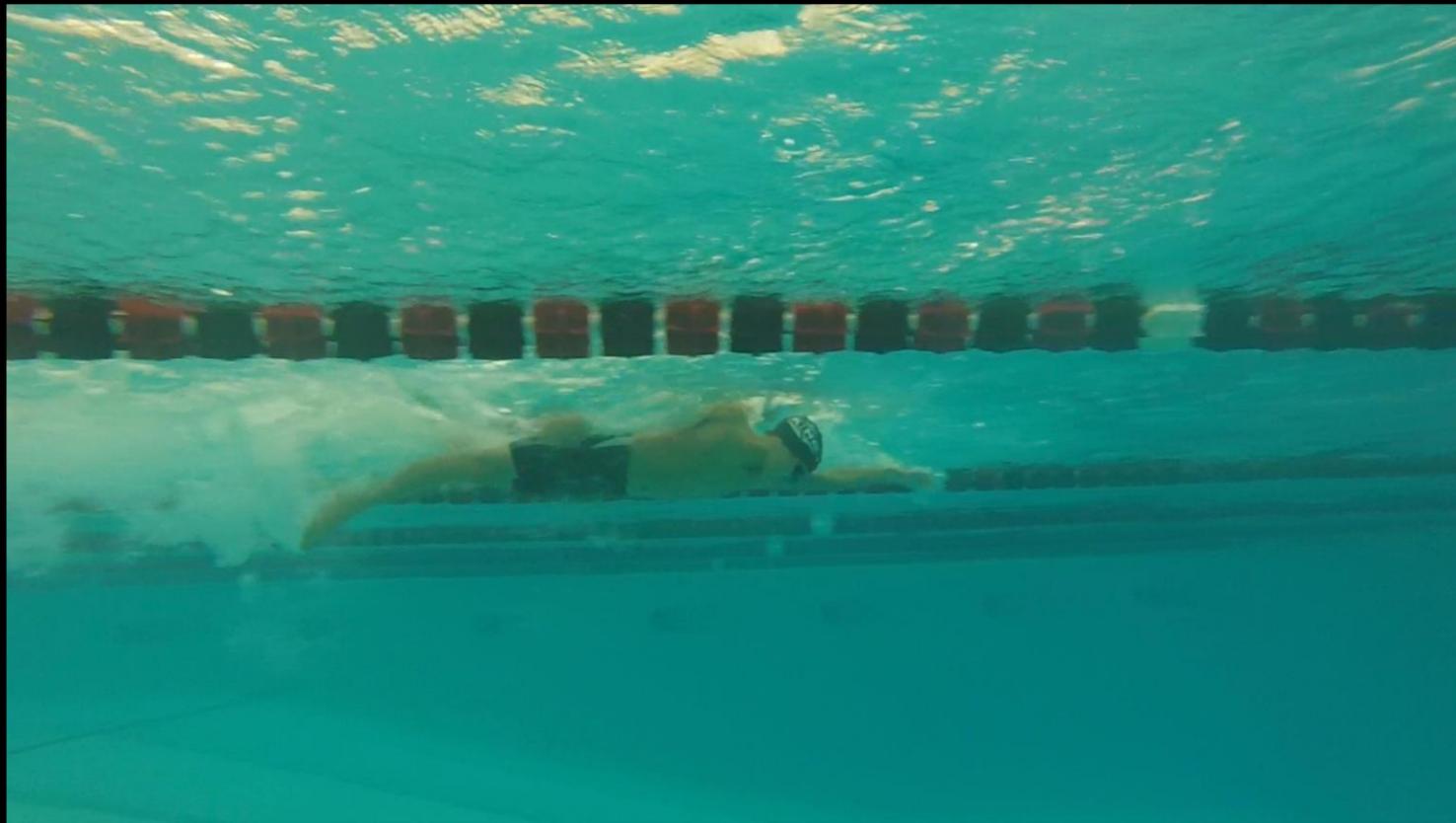
Technique focus

- Learned about 5 things per stroke from September to March
- Will share 3 things per stroke that made a big difference in their technical efficiency
- Used drills to isolate what skill we were working on. Didn't use them as a main focus. I've found if the main focus is getting better at the drill then they'll get better at the drill and not necessarily get better at the skill

Freestyle

- How to flutter kick effectively. Using the kick and the core to have a better body line
- Pulling freestyle with a high elbow
- Rotation timing

Having an Effective Flutter Kick



-Snapping the kick all the way down before leading the up-kick with the back of the knee. Viewing the kick as a whipping motion

Having an Effective Flutter Kick

-An example of a set we would do would be to get out of the water and keep one foot in and try to carry the water back and forth like a whipping motion. Would make sure the leg would snap all the way down before doing the up kick.

-Set would be 10 kicks out of the water each leg.

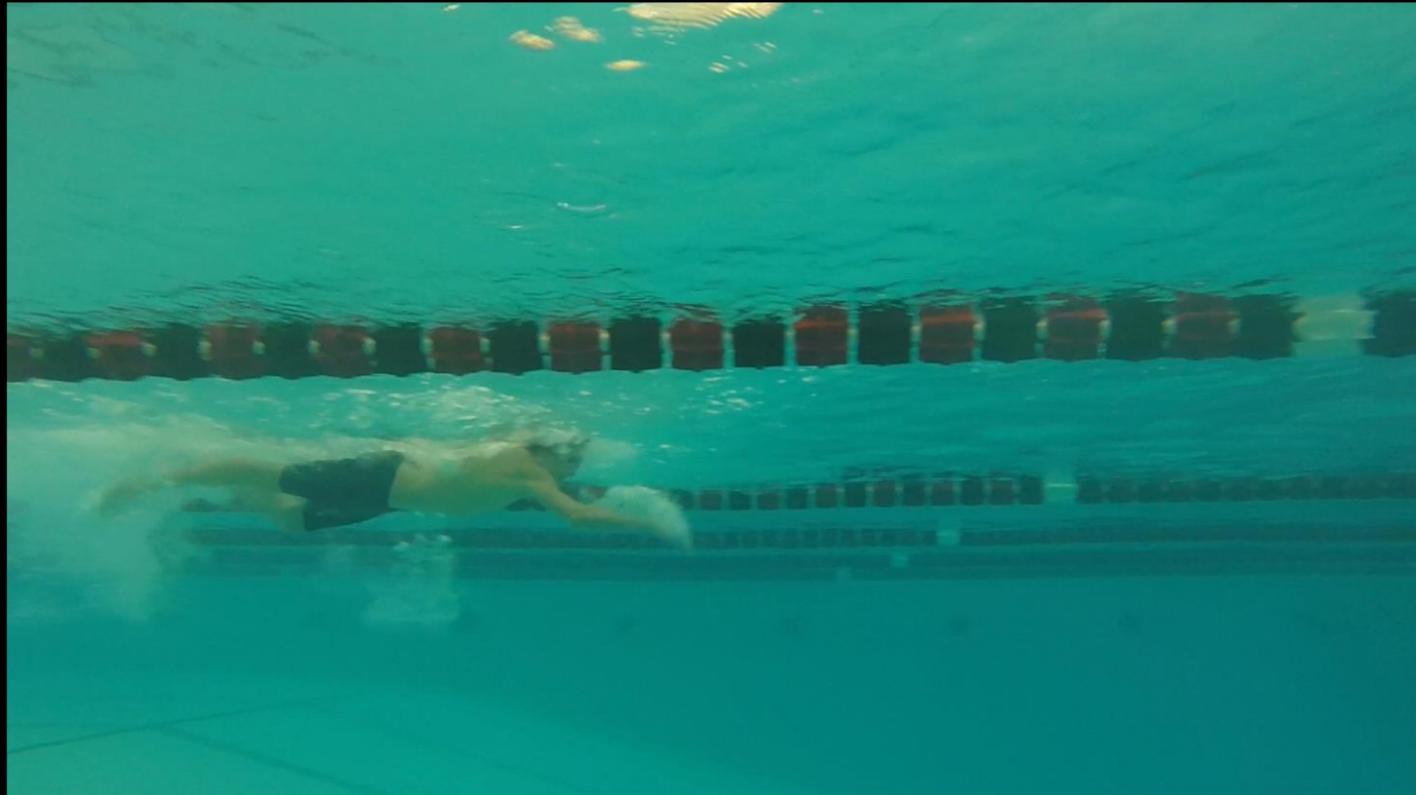
4x25 3 left kick 3 right kick

2x25 perfect kick

4x25 perfect free with the focus being on having a consistent kick.

We would do that 2 rounds

Pulling Freestyle with a High Elbow



-Model of what not to do.

-Elbow is low forcing the forearm to push the water in the wrong direction

-Want the elbow high and the forearm to create a perpendicular angle to the body

-I use the phrasing of don't pull back until your forearm and fingertips are pointed toward the bottom of the pool

Pulling Freestyle with a High Elbow

-We did a drill called high elbow drill. Basically a doggy paddle. All they would do is keep their arms still and just try to move their forearm to point towards the bottom of the pool then move it back up. They would feel the pull down and the resistance on the way back up. Goal being to move forward with just the initial catch

-A set would be 4x25 high elbow drill

2x25 pulling with one arm with the other arm at the side

4x25 perfect free with the focus being on pulling with a high elbow

2 rounds

Rotation Timing on Freestyle

- Rotating with quick all at once motions versus the constantly moving side to side. This will avoid the hips looking like they're wiggling.
- Timing is to pull through the hips then rotate all at once. More effective kick and you can keep the perpendicular angle with the pull longer than if you rotate early
- Flatter hips and rotating forward versus rotating side to side

Rotation Timing on Freestyle

-A drill we do is rotation drill where their hands are at their side and they just practice rotating. We also go one arm drill where they practice pulling through the hips and then rotating quick all at once

-A set would be 2x25 rotation drill

4x25 pulling with one arm. Other arm at their side

4x25 perfect focusing on the quick rotation movements. Pulling through the hips and then rotating

2 rounds



Backstroke

- Flutter kicking with shoulder rotation and flatter hips
- High elbow pull
- Accelerating the hand through the hips

Rotation on Backstroke

- Pulling through the hips then rotating
- Pushing the shoulder up on the recovery. Rolling the shoulders over the water
- Keeping the hips flatter with a quicker smaller kick

Rotation on Backstroke

-We would do rotation drill of hands at their side working on rotating without their arms. Every time they rotate they push the shoulder up and over the water. Then we would pull with one arm to trying to pull through the hips then rotate with every time trying to push that shoulder over the water

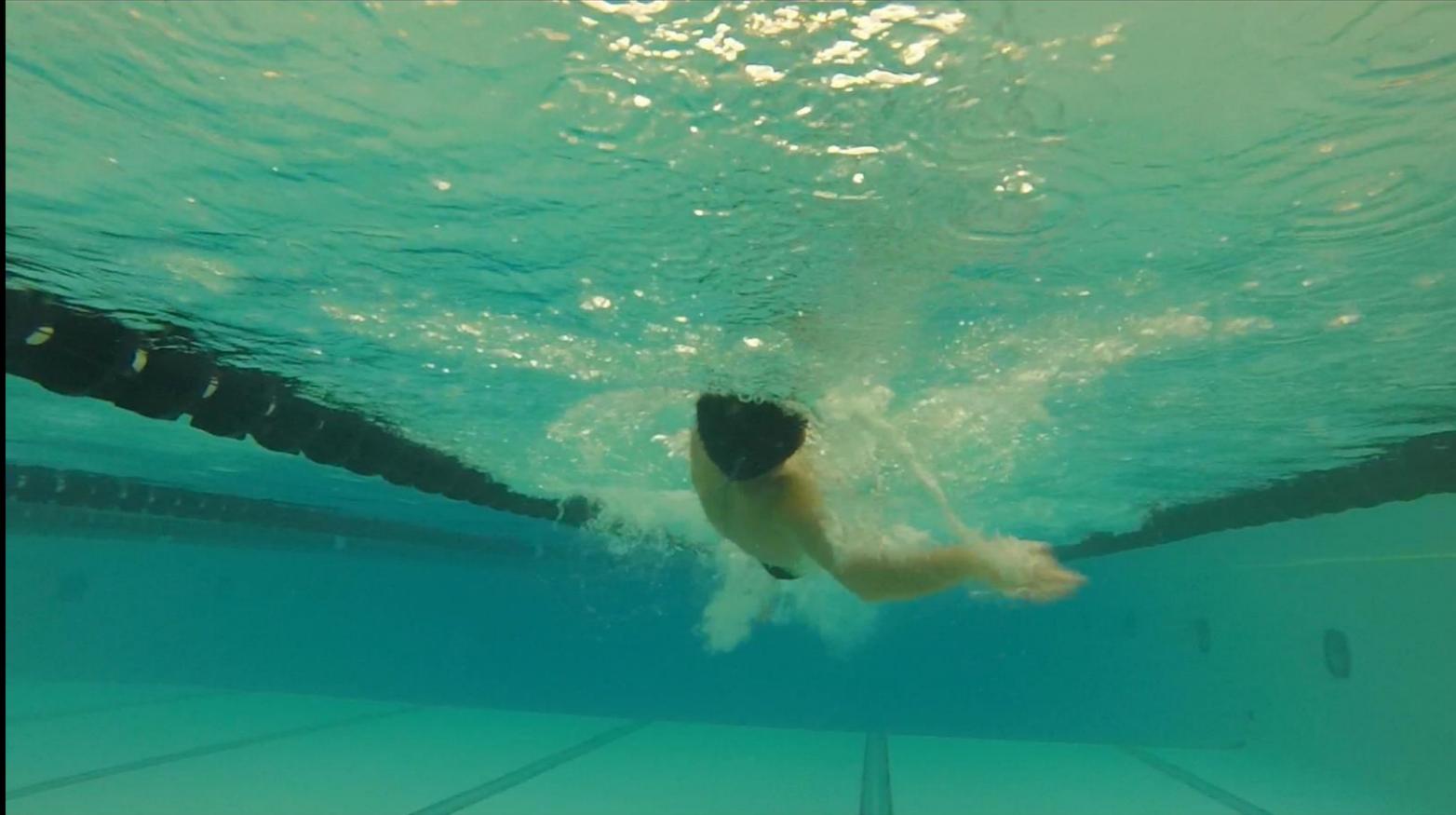
-A set we would do would be 2x25 rotation drill

4x25 one arm back

4x25 perfect back focusing on timing and using their shoulders

2 rounds

High Elbow Pull on Backstroke



-Goal to be to get the elbow in line with the hand on the pull to create that perpendicular catch. Other goal is point the fingertips towards the side wall.

High Elbow Pull on Backstroke

-A drill we would do we called elbow up elbow down. Keeping the arm in the water the whole time to feel the pull on the way down and to feel the resistance on the way back up.

-A set would be 4x25 elbow up elbow down

2x25 one arm pull

4x25 perfect backstroke focusing on as soon as the arm moved into the water to bend the elbow into the right position and point the fingertips toward the side wall.

2 rounds

Accelerating the Hands Through the Hips

- Would try to accelerate the hands through the hips and up so there was no pause and more consistent tempo
- Affected the timing to eliminate any pause they had before on their backstroke

Accelerating the Hands Through the Hips

-A drill we would do was slap back. One arm pointed straight up toward the ceiling and the other arm to be pulling. You slap your hand and replace it with your other hand. Forces good body-line and one arm to constantly be moving.

-A set we would do was 4x25 slap back

2x25 one arm pull

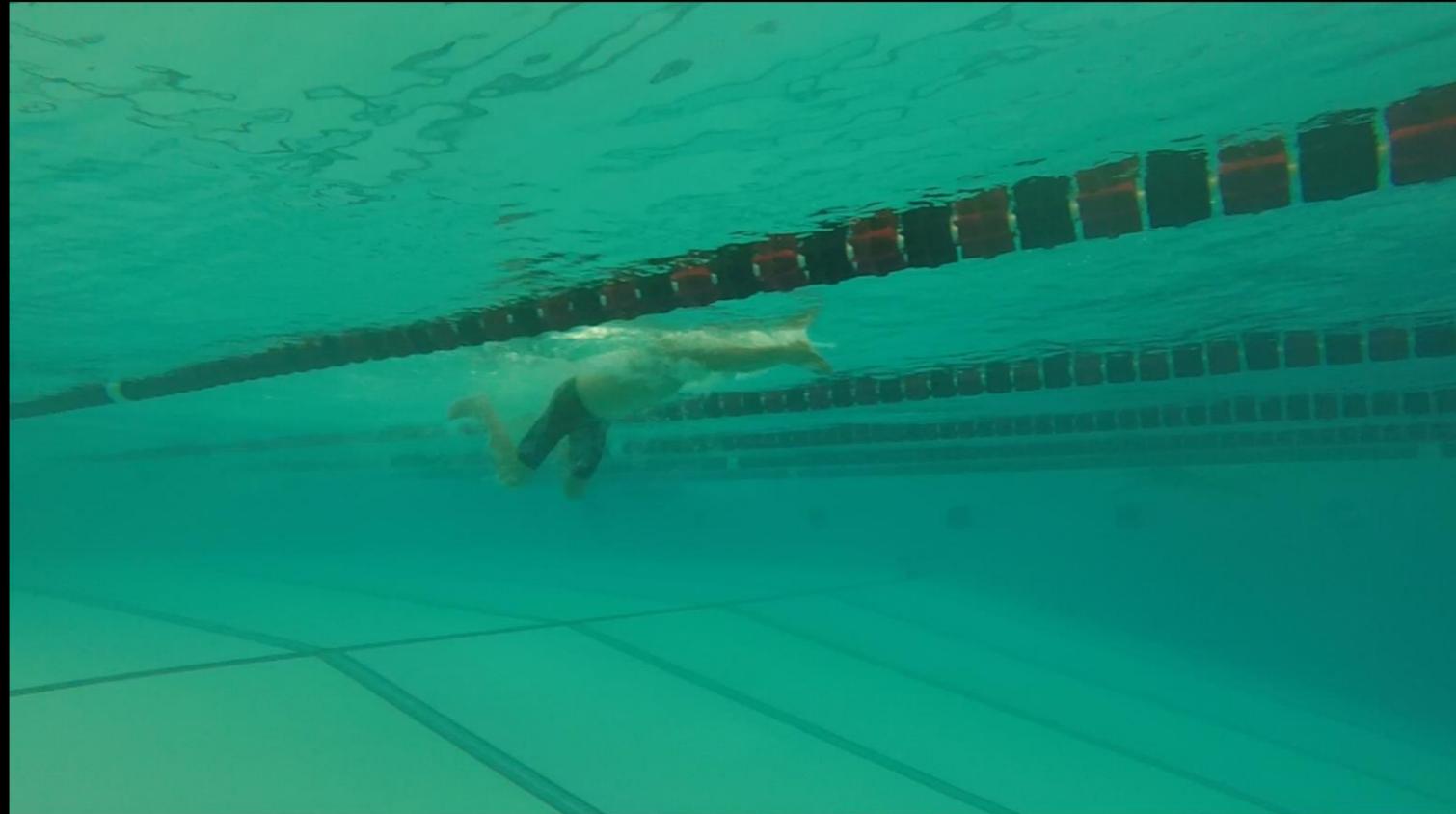
4x25 perfect working on accelerating the hands through the hips. A line I would say was throw the water at your feet

2 rounds

Breastroke

- Breastroke Kick
- Pull motion
- Fast hands and fast heels

Breastroke Kick



-Knees inside the shoulders and feet pointed out towards the side walls. Goal to be to carry the water all the way through to the snap at the end

Breastroke Kick

-We did a lot of breastroke kick with a pull buoy in.

-A set we did was 4x25 breastroke kick with a pull buoy in focusing on flexing the feet out wide

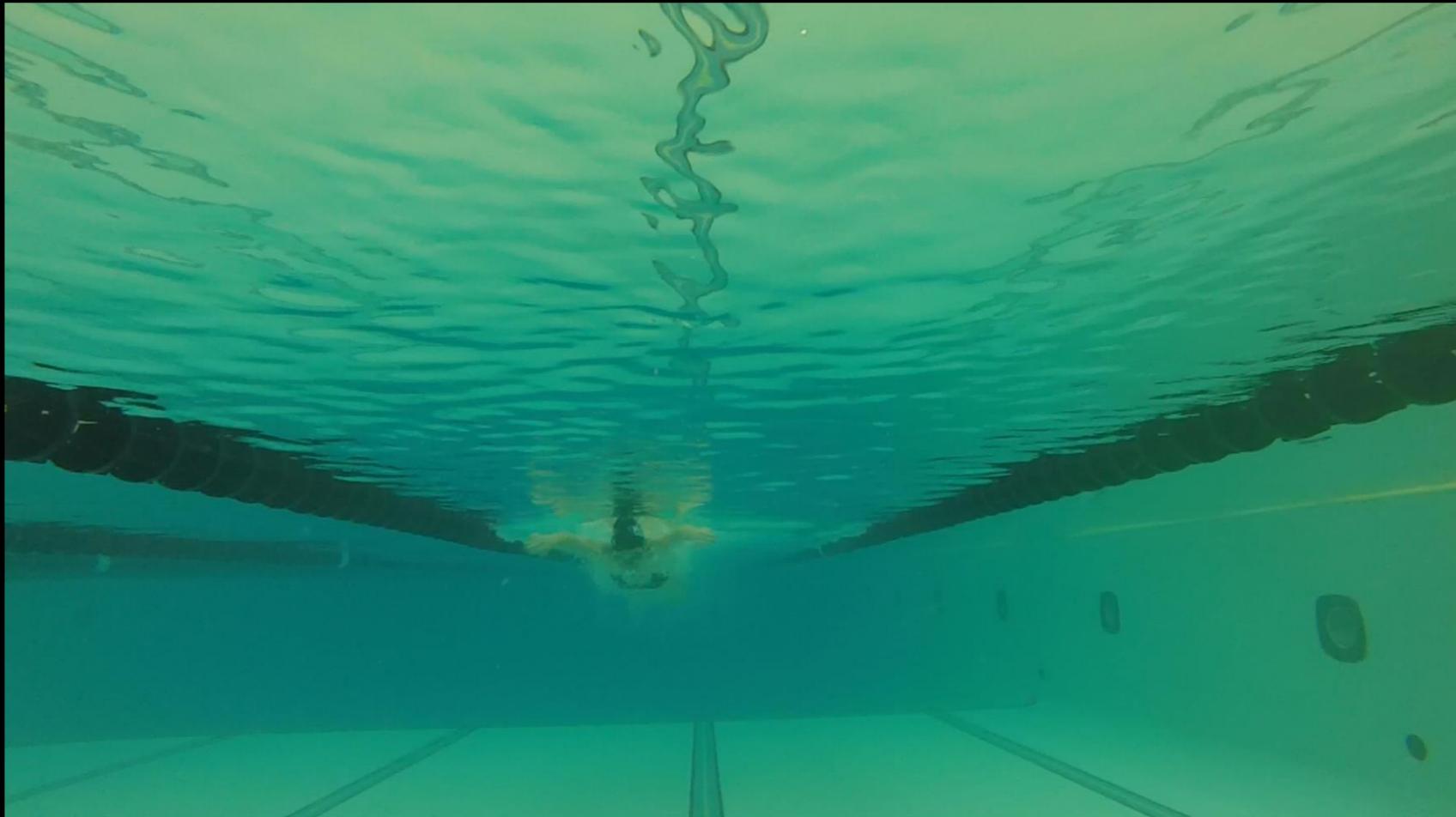
2x25 2 kicks 1 pull

4x25 perfect breastroke working on keeping the knees in, flexing the feet out wide, and carrying the water all the way through to the snap

2 rounds



Breastroke Pull Motion



-Goal was to keep the head in line till the hands turned the corner. On the pull create the circular motion to drive the arms straight through.

Breastroke Pull Motion

-We did a drill of 5 scull motions with their head in line into 2 perfect strokes. Practicing keeping their head in line on the out sweep and raising the body up as they turn the corner with their hands

-A set would be 4x25 5 sculls into 2 strokes

2x25 Breastroke pull no kick

4x25 Breastroke focusing on keeping the head down on the out sweep then pulling in a circular motion right into driving the hands forward. Always looking to make sure they're moving forward at all times

2 rounds



Fast Hands and Fast Heels

-Goal was to bring the heels up faster to create less resistance on the way up. Using the timing to create faster hands on the shooting motion. Driving the tempo through the heels

Fast Hands and Fast Heels

-We did 2 kicks 1 pull working driving the heels up fast every time.

-A set we'd do was 2x25 breaststroke kick

4x25 2 kicks 1 pull

4x25 perfect working on driving the heels up fast and shooting the arms forward fast

We'd do 2 rounds of that

Butterfly

- 2 kicks the same size. Timing out the finish of the kick with the arm entry and the finish of the pull
- High elbow pull
- Pressing forward rather than up and down.

Kick Size and Timing

-Having them know how far their feet should come up and how far their feet should go down. I say toes should come to the surface and they should kick down to where their feet go below their knees

-We do chest press drill where they have a kick board turned to the side with their hands on top of it. They practice kicking with their feet coming up to the same spot and kicking down to the same spot

-A set would be 2x25 dolphin kick on their side

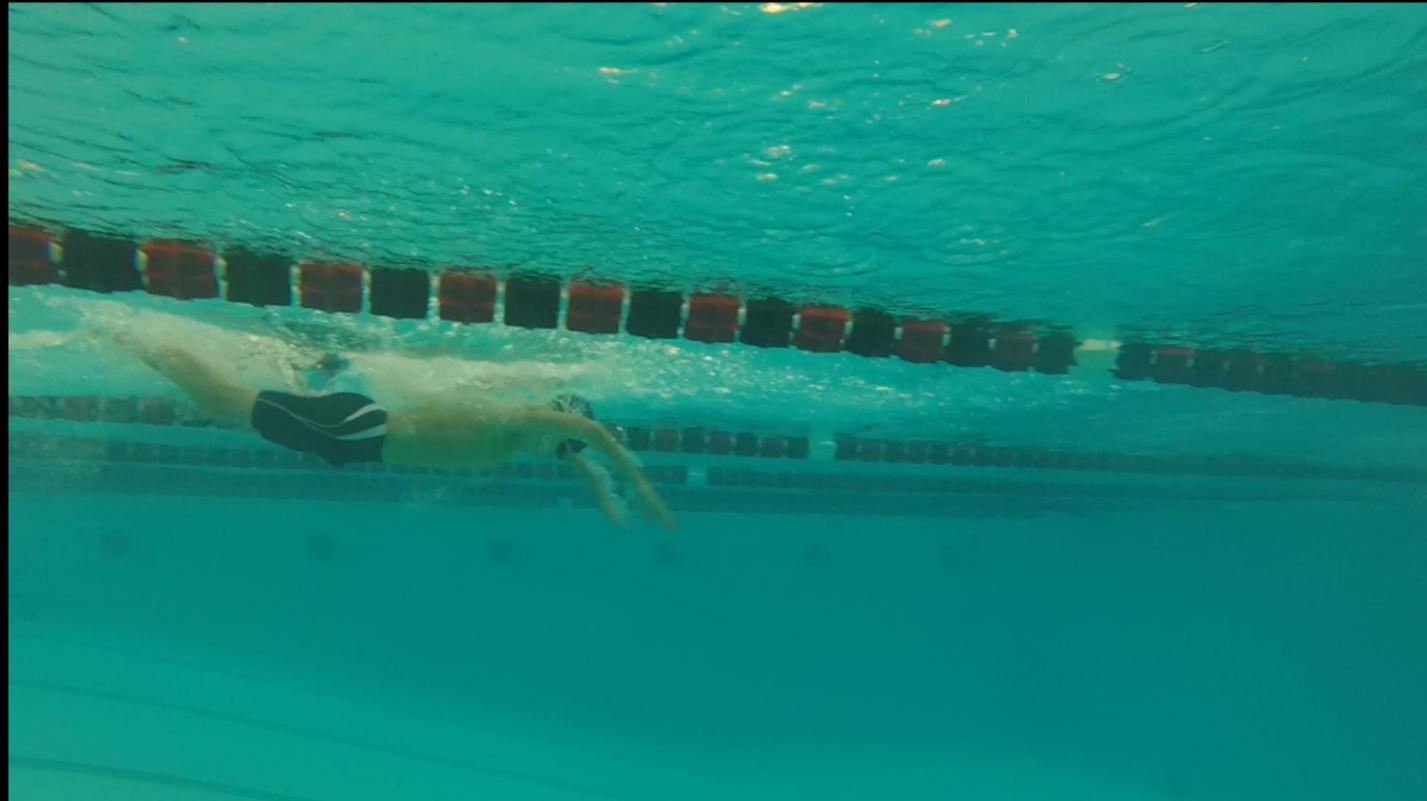
4x25 chest press

4x25 perfect working on kick size and timing

We do that 2 rounds



High Elbow Butterfly



- Getting the fingertips to point towards the bottom of the pool as the initial catch
- Pulling with your forearms and creating that perpendicular angle

High Elbow Butterfly

-We do high elbow drill of going left arm, right arm, both arms. Only trying to pull with the forearm

-A set would be 4x25 high elbow left, right, both

2x25 pull with underwater recovery working on carrying the water from the beginning

4x25 perfect fly

We do that 2 rounds

Pressing Forward

-Allowing everything to be flatter and moving forward at all times. Not up and down

-We do fly with flutter kick trying to get the feeling of being flatter and allowing the chest to move forward when the arms enter

-A set would be 2x25 chest press

4x25 fly with flutter kick

4x25 perfect fly working on moving forward and not up and down

Thank you

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my presentation today. I hope everyone can take away a couple of positive things from it. Swimming has provided me with tremendous opportunity and I feel very fortunate to be in a situation where I can provide young swimmers with that same opportunity

