

MY WAY TO A PERSONAL COACHING PHILOSOPHY: PART THREE

Tony Pearce recalls his meeting with the legendary coach 'Doc' Counsilman and discusses the progression of stroke analysis down the years

Coaches fixing their gaze on smartphones with crab-like thumbs, seemingly hoping to avoid eye contact with their swimmers, headphones firmly fixed in place.

A simple coaching point is now being replaced by a text message or tweet. Got a coaching problem? Download the latest training bullet points on swimming 'mindfully'.

This might be an easier way to coach but is it the right way?

With so many gizmos available, the sports scientist has access to the most precious commodity on earth - information.

Of course, the accessibility of information is essential in our everyday lives. In swimming, it is also important in terms of any special requirements of the swimmer.

But fear not, the partnership of the coach and swimmer is still ahead of the sports scientist. The words of Ray Cayless resonate with me: 'What did you see in the stroke?'

Under the water

Aptly, in the late 1970s, stroke analysis started to consider what was actually happening under the water. James 'Doc' Counsilman had published *The Competitive Swimming Manual for Coaches and Swimmers* and was continuing to pioneer the use of the motion camera as a scientific instrument in the analysis of swimming techniques.

With a more practical approach, both coach and swimmer could put into practice many of Counsilman's ideas. Was this perhaps the beginning of the true partnership between coach and swimmer?

It was around this time that I decided to travel to Indiana University to meet the 'Doc'. His underwater photography revised our understanding of stroke mechanics. Doc had produced the first complete stroke analysis, not only of stroke mechanics and the forces developed, but also of the actual propulsive mechanics used in swimming.

He had cleverly contrived a unique system of underwater strobe light photography, using

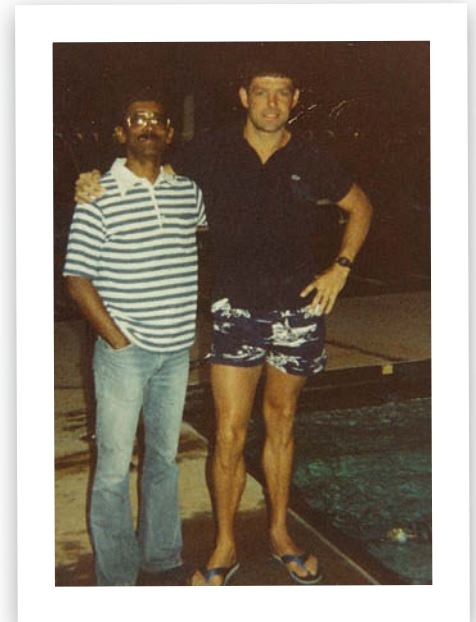
it to show, for the first time, the true nature of human swimming propulsion. You could say that the age of information technology had truly arrived.

Later, Ernest Maglischo, in his book *Swimming Faster*, successfully developed an intellectualised version of what Counsilman had discovered.

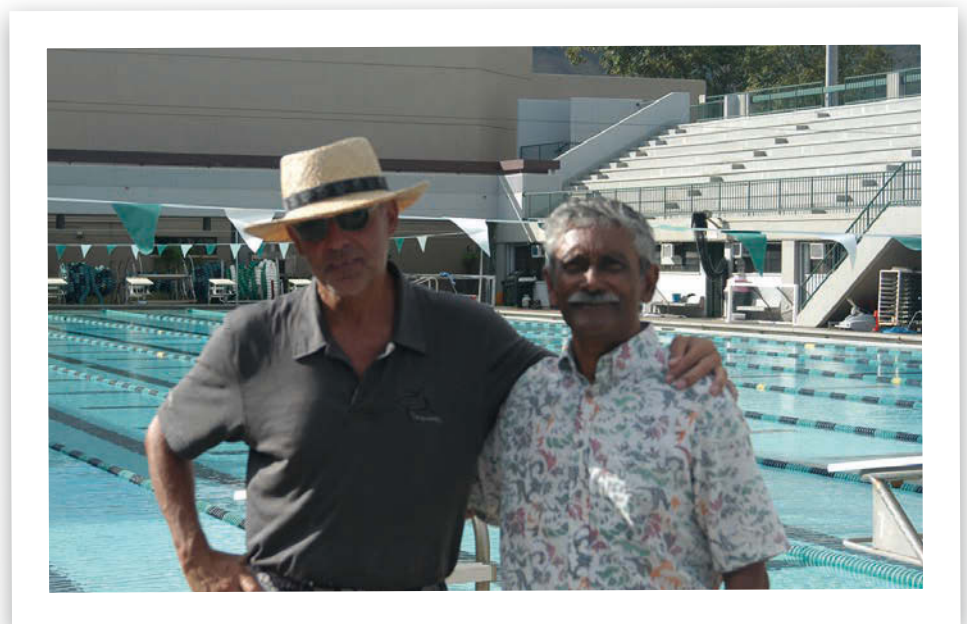
Swimming Faster is an excellent reference book for any aspiring coach.

Some years later, I travelled to the University of Hawaii in Honolulu to visit Dr Jan Prins - an original Counsilman disciple in 1967 - who I had not seen for some 30 years when he was coach to the University of Hawaii men's swim team.

He is now the director of Swim Hawaii as well as being editor-in-chief of *Swim Technique* magazine. At that time, he was preparing a presentation to the ASCA (American Swimming Coaches Association)



Tony with Jan Prins. Then and now, 30 years on



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