

World Coaches Clinic on the modern use of information technology in stroke analysis.

Where and how should the hands enter the water? Should the pull be bent or straight? What should be the path of the hands in the stroke? Should the stroke be short, long, slow or fast? To me, Jan had brought stroke analysis into yet another dimension.

Stroke analysis

Let's travel back to the 1960s. 'Tony, the Age of Aquarius never happened!' The iconic film *Blow-Up* bears discussion in terms of stroke analysis in swimming. The story revolved around a professional fashion photographer - a David Bailey take-off - who inadvertently photographs a murder in a park.

Intrigued by this, he blows up parts of his pictures to illuminate details, blowing up smaller and smaller elements and finally putting the puzzle together.

Whole-part-whole?

Cue the famous scene at the end of the film where, at a party at Lindsay House in Cheyne Walk, he tells the story to his agent, Ron, to which a somewhat dazed Ron turns to him and asks 'What did you see in that park?' ('What did you see in the stroke?') to which David despondently answers, 'Nothing!'

The ending of the film is one of the most talked about in film history as David comes to terms with his own perception of reality.

Ron was played by the famed actor, Peter Bowles who I see now and again as we both live in Barnes. Peter has confided in me the actual plot.

So, in terms of stroke analysis, it is important to remember that there is no final answer. It's your perception of reality because, due to other factors such as the trade-off between speed and accuracy, form, adaption and consistency of training never do add up. This is because it's not supposed to.

I eventually passed the exalted ASA Coaches Certificate at the second attempt - and even then, I had to carry a section.

My abiding memory of those coaching courses was my tutor John Verrier who, in terms of coaching education, was years ahead of his time.

Later, I was so fortunate to assist John in tutoring ASA Coaching Courses at the Crystal Palace ASA Summer School.

John went on to become the ASA Education Officer. I learnt so much from him.

Successful career

I have had a successful coaching career at age group and senior level and have been labelled as somewhere between accomplished and being too good for my own good!

But, the irony of all time, I was offered ('Just take it!') a job coaching Masters swimmers. It's like being a once-young leading actor who is no longer suited to playing the star role so now takes character parts.

Looking back, I now know that my apprehension was all out of proportion, for what I have discovered is that this was not just a career move but a growth move too.

However, this did not deter me from further embarking on a degree in Sports Science at Loughborough University.

As a mature student, I was at least twice the age of most students. I came to the conclusion that swimming is mostly psychological in that it is mostly about the performance of skill under stress.

Listen and learn

One has to listen and learn from the swimmers in order to differentiate the important from the unimportant.

'Tony, I think there is something wrong with my right-hand catch; could you have a quick look, please?' I provide what I think is the



Tony now coaches Masters swimmers (as under) with a big smile on his face

appropriate soundbite to which the reply is 'Thanks, Tony!' and off they go.

So, the question that you may now ask is 'Tony, what did you see in that stroke?'

What I see in reality is the result of the partnership of the coach and the swimmer. It takes real hard work - and it takes time. Nothing is for free. You have to work for it, and yes, there are rewards.

Eventually, you really achieve something and, surprise, surprise, the partnership is yet again ahead of the sports scientist.

Coincidence? Am I now guilty of refusing to change with the times? This takes me back 50 years ago to 1967.

Now, it is Masters swimmers who await. It is then that I walk on the deck with a big smile on my face.

Yes, I'm a survivor. Are you? 

- **Tony's Masters Swimming website:** www.mastersswimming.co.uk



REFLECTIONS