

MY WAY TO A PERSONAL COACHING PHILOSOPHY: PART TWO

It was the era of flower power and the Beach Boys but Hotel California had other attractions for **Tony Pearce** as he sought to broaden his early coaching experience

With the end of the '60s and the advent of the '70s, Britain, went through a social change. The Swinging Sixties had gone; it was time for payback. The Rolling Stones, as tax exiles, had fled to Nice in the South of France and produced their iconic album, *Exile on Main Street*.

At the same time, British swimming was seemingly making a similar departure. Lack of facilities, funding and coaching expertise led to a relatively small but significant exodus of British swimmers to train in the US. For them, this was their only chance to aspire to a world-class level.

These swimmers either used a variety of sponsorship deals or were fortunate enough to gain university swimming scholarships. It was this loss overseas of some of the country's greatest talent which I believe influenced the evolution of the British Swimming Coaches Association.

Fly Boy Schmidt

But what finally prompted my own extended journey to the States? As a young swimmer in the 1960s, I had always been curious about what was happening in the swimming world across the Atlantic. I happened to come across *World Swimming Magazine*, at that time a rarity in Britain.

I was amused at the nicknames of some of the swimmers. Fred 'Fly Boy' Schmidt was an outstanding high school butterfly swimmer, and was recruited by none other than James 'Doc' Counsilman to his University of Indiana Swim Team.

Recently on YouTube, I came across an old black-and-white film of Schmidt demonstrating the butterfly. Interestingly, his demonstration was narrated by seven times US Olympic coach, 'Coach of the 20th Century' George Haines.

Amazing story

Haines' coaching career is an amazing story

in itself. As a high school teacher at Santa Clara High School, he founded the famous Santa Clara Swim Club in 1951, producing 26 future Olympians including Mark Spitz.

As an aspiring young swim coach in the 1970s, I marvelled at, in particular, the achievement of the Long Beach Swim Club in California. Their men's 4x200m freestyle relay team had broken the world record. A mere club team being even faster than national teams? I just had to get some of this.

So, with my life savings having financed a ticket, I began what proved to be a prolonged hiatus in California.

Eventually, after having annoyed the bus driver with my lack of knowledge as to my final destination, I arrived at the Belmont Plaza Indoor 50m Olympic Pool situated on the Long Beach ocean front.

There I stood on the pooldeck, exhausted from travelling, still very formally dressed, with my suitcase in my hand. I looked completely out of place. But I was there: Long Beach Swim Club.

World-class swimmers

What struck me first was the large number of senior swimmers, obviously of world-class level, training together. They looked awesome. Needless to say, I did not have to guess who the head coach was. Standing at the end of the deck, he really was king of all he surveyed. Yes, there was Dick Jochums, the man himself.

After the swim session, I managed to gain an audience with him. I was somewhat apprehensive, but I think he realised that I was genuinely harmless. Just a young aspiring swim coach from the UK searching for the real secret of success in swim coaching. He was not patronising or dismissive in any way. In fact, he was very accommodating and I soon found myself training with the club.

My first morning swim session began. Actually, less a swim session than a swim practice, as it was treated as though you were



Barnes SC masters swimmer Ben Bradley, who is coached by Tony Pearce

practising for a race. If memory serves me correctly, it went something like this:

1. Warm-up. 1x800 choice.
2. Kick 1000 in the form of 1x500 hard then, 10x50 fast. No fins used. Get the kick out of the way first. In an actual race, the legs are the first to go anyway, aren't they? Pull free. 1x800 hypoxic breathing (controlled breath-holding) to get the heart and lungs working.
3. Major set: Swim free. Swim is the hardest thing that you do. Descending series of swims. Measured, not only in time but, more importantly, through pain, the same pain which should be experienced in a race. Where the physical and the mental come together as one.
4. Minor set.
5. Warm-down.

Picturesque

Sometimes, after practice, I would walk

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