



Season Planning by Scott Colby (1995)

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Author

By Alec Wathen

I am grateful for this opportunity to talk to my peers about season planning. In a selfish way it really helped me with my planning and forced me to take my planning to “the next level.” It would be wonderful if we all had to prepare this talk, then out of a hat one gets chosen. It would be a good exercise to evaluate what you are doing. My biggest complaint about talks at this clinic is that the speaker spends 30 minutes or more on theory and then runs out of time to get to the practical stuff you can use. My goal is to get to the practical stuff in 5 minutes or less.

1."Failing to plan is planning to fail." (John Wooden) 2.You must plan from the general to the specific.

3.You must follow through on your plan.

We all have a finished product in mind when we start the season. We pretty much know what our big shave/taper/paper meet is going to be. We need to start here. You probably had some things you vowed to work on at your last championship meet. Perhaps as a whole your team could do better on turns, or pacing, etc.

I always start from the beginner's mind and analyze everything we did the previous season. I will discard what did not work, or was a waste of time, or things that if we do it again it will become stale. I also keep those things that I thought we did that contributed to our successes and could contribute again with a few changes. Then there is the new stuff. Some of this I pick up at this clinic, some at camps in Colorado Springs, some from deck chat with other coaches. I had a private mini-clinic with Greg Troy from Bolles School one day since we happened to be on the same flight. So all this stuff is in my brain and I need to put it on paper for several reasons;

1. I will forget some of them by mid season.
2. If I share it with the athletes, they will understand what we're doing – and help me remember should I forget to follow through.
3. When you think about all the techniques to teach, work on psychology, education about rest, nutrition, race strategy, dryland, flexibility, taper, fun, etc. How do you remember to do it all?
4. I can log how much we do of each type of training. For example. If I decide we need to work on starts more this season. That's all fine and dandy, but in January, how often are we working on starts? Do I whip out my taper plan and think, "Oops! we need more start work." or do I

hit the taper time with the confidence that we have done 10 minutes of start work twice a week for 25 weeks. I just don't think it's got a very good chance of happening if it is not in writing.

That is the theory portion of the presentation, now let's get down to business.

NOTE: The charts at the end of this article can be used any way you like. The worst thing you could do is use them straight out yourself without creating your own. Use them as a model to develop your own charts that fit your own needs!

GENERAL PLAN

To start with the General Plan, please look at the first form labeled "GROUP 'Has Jr Cuts'". I think the more specific you can get on the plan the better in the long run. You may have more adjustments to be made, but you can at least get things on paper and have thought them through in advance. My handout in no way should represent THE way to do it. It is meant to be A way to do it. I encourage you to use this to stimulate your imagination and creativity and use what you can and change what you want.

Traditionally, season planning includes yardage, meets, and maybe some dryland plan. I would ask you to consider putting things in your plan other than the traditional items. I recommend you include test sets, energy systems, stroke drills to be emphasized, fun/team building events, kicking, pulling, start/turn/finish work, and team meetings/athlete education. I think every category needs to be spelled out in greater detail on a separate

sheet. Your flexibility program needs to change as the season progresses for the sake of variety if nothing else. If it is written into the plan, it will be easy to keep things interesting and progressing.

Let's look at the handout for the General Plan. You see dates on the left. Weeks are numbered either chronologically from the first week of the season to the last or counted down to the last or aligned with the calendar, so that Week 1 includes January 1st.

Next we see the phases outlined. You will know if you want to gradually go from phase to phase or make a drastic change in your program from phase to phase. Coach Jonty Skinner's plan lists a primary and secondary training system for each phase.

Now we have the volume of yardage we will be shooting for. If you plan for 5,000 per practice for 10 practices, that's 50,000. But suppose you have a meet you want to train through. You may need an additional practice that week to get to your 50,000. Or you may decide it's okay if you only go 40,000-45,000 that week. So I have the number of practices we will hold each week in the morning and in the afternoon and how much I plan to do in each practice. Then I can get my weekly total. It will also help you to increase yardage over the course of the season at a reasonable rate. You probably should not double yardage from one week to the next. Overtraining and injuries will be the result.

There should be a spot near the volume for the actual volume done as opposed to the plan. We are all at the mercy of a pool leak, illness, or other reduced training from time to time. Also, life isn't perfect and you will not have the exact same yardage actually done as you planned to do. However, your goal is to be as close as possible.

Now let's look at the specific energy systems. I again have an average yards per set and number of sets per week. This is especially important for systems you can easily forget to train – like the SP3 or a lactate set. You don't want to arrive at the taper and realize you wished you had done more speed work.

I also put in kicking and pulling as a energy systems. I always do a great deal of kicking. I alternate practices – one with fins, the next without. I have always shot for 1500 kicking per practice. This season, I will shoot for 3,000-4,000 per practice kicking, but only kick 3-4 times per week instead of every day. I like the idea of the extra overload and recovery of the legs. I can also let the upper body recover on days of heavy kicking.

There is a not a column for test sets, but I certainly would include one. Hy-Tek Workout manager now has a pretty good system for tracking test sets. Traditionally I get a roster and set up a page for each test set that I will repeat. I keep it in a notebook and show the athletes that day what their previous best was on the set and take it from there. If it is not included in your plan, you will not do the set often enough. On the other hand, I have held off up to a week to do a T30 because I knew they just weren't ready. They were too tired from the previous week, too many of them were sick, etc. So you do need some flexibility and intuition to adjust the plan as you go. However, you do need the "stick-to-it-ness" to stay close to the plan.

The next column is drills and skills development. I like the idea of picking 2-3 drills per stroke and using them for 3-4 weeks. I read somewhere that it takes 20 days to develop a habit. If I need to focus on breathing every three in freestyle for the first three weeks, that needs to be written down. The second three weeks I may focus on holding your breath on the finish from the flags in. Simple stuff, that they should know as age groupers coming into a senior training group, but habits that need to be reinforced, nevertheless. I would do the same with the stroke drills. Teach one or two drills for each stroke and spend three or four weeks perfecting them. Let them learn to do them on a fast interval. When they've mastered a drill rotate in another drill for that stroke. You can actually build the stroke throughout the season.

Let's take the breaststroke for example. Maybe you focus on the pull and kick separately early in the season and bring them together and work on timing and synchronizing the two later on.

A psychology plan is important, too. You can't start teaching relaxation the last two weeks of the season. You've got to take the time to do that throughout the year. You may emphasize it later, but it needs to be started early. When are you going to meet with the swimmers about their goals? I have found that setting goals for the next season before the end of the current season helps eliminate that urge to take three or four weeks off before they start to get "serious" about training again. I will schedule individual goal meetings in September, December, late February, and July this year. I need to have that in writing as part of my plan.

Many times I'll take a program right out of a book. I've got one book that goes through setting goals, deciding why you are swimming, and step by step relaxation drills that build upon each other from basic to more complex. When I follow these things and guide the athletes through the sessions, I've noticed a great impact on their ability to relax and visualize.

I like to put down the things I want to educate the swimmers about. I have been coaching for 20 years and I know a lot and have a great deal of experience. Some swimmers in my group have been at it for three years. They can't possibly know it all. I need to teach. Even to the ones that heard it last year need to be reminded and taught again. Hopefully each time they hear it they retain a little more and it makes more sense to them.

Lastly, I like to put down fun. I am happy to coach and train all the time. I love it. Not everyone is like that and I think if we plan fun activities away from the pool, we'll be more successful in the pool. I might schedule a camping trip, visit and LSU athletic event. Those of you with pro teams in town can get the team name on the scoreboard if you buy enough tickets in advance. When I coached in Arlington, Texas, we took great pride at the annual game we would attend in starting the "wave" around the stadium. If you don't put it down as part of your plan, it's easy to forget.

PHASE PLAN

The phase plan carries over from the General Plan the broad objectives and parameters. The plan is now developed further in more detail. It is up to the individual coach to decide if the phase changes occur abruptly or are

gradually worked in. In the phase chart may include specific sets, drills, and parameters for practice.

Average distance per set, techniques to be emphasized, athletes' education, meets, special days, test sets, and dryland emphasis are all on one sheet.

WEEKLY PLAN

It follows from the Phase Plan that the Weekly Plan will start to show greater detail. The Weekly Plan will probably be the same or similar for each week within the phase. There will be minor exceptions for meets, or extenuating circumstances. You may also want to change the training load from week to week. Perhaps you will be doing heavy volume on Monday, Wednesday, Friday one week and Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday on the next. All this can be spelled out in advance. Perhaps you will do weight training on some days one week and different days another week. Maybe you need to accommodate for a meet on the weekend. It will affect your plan for Friday and Monday, depending on the type of meet.

Again, I allow space for you to carry over your Phase Plan criteria and again provide greater detail for the weekly plan. You can now list sets, training emphasis, drills you want to repeat throughout the week.

DAILY PLAN

Finally, there is less to do on a daily basis after consulting the Weekly Plan. You can just fill in the specifics for that day. I use Hy-Tek's Workout

Manager and have a possibility to look up 19 sets for each energy category. I use this often, drop the set in and then modify it for my specific needs for the day.

Again, my day to day sets will better reflect the Phase Plan and the General Plan if I spend the time referring to them when I write the practice for the day.

I also have places for you to remind the coach who was absent at the previous practice so you can ask them, "Where were you?" The "Objectives" section is included for the athletes to help them know what to focus on for the practice.

I like the idea of an opening and closing motivational speech for each practice. It could be one minute long. I'd also include any pertinent announcements, especially entry deadlines or schedule changes. I am no Vince Lombardi, so, I'm better off if I know what I want to say before I start talking. Dr. Keith Bell's books are useful. Nuts and Bolts and Winning Isn't Everything have many short ideas you can educate your athletes with. I can always change and compliment the group on a job well done or let them know if their performance was unacceptable as a group.

CONCLUSION

Proper planning insures that you are following your plan on a daily basis. There is a big difference when the plan is followed than when the

coach is “shooting from the hip.” There are so many different things you can do to be a success in this sport and practice time is limited. You may as well get the most out of each practice session if you are following your plan.

If you share your plan with your athletes, I think they will realize you have a full time job, you’ve put a great deal of thought and effort into the program, and they may understand why they are doing what you’re giving them and probably do it a little better. If it is shared with the athletes you can be sure it will be shared with the parents. This is a big plus for you and the profession. They are easily impressed if you’ve at least got a plan. You are a professional. I encourage you to use these forms as they are or adapt them to your own needs, or share them with your assistants.

References

Coach Molly Wolf, LSU Assistant Coach (conversations)