

# High School and the Swimming Pool:

## Making it Cool and not ending up a Fool.

*By Wayne Goldsmith*

One of the toughest assignments for all athletes is the balance between sport and study. Swimmers and athletes generally are by their nature high achievers. They live in a world of time management, goal setting, overcoming adversity, personal challenges and self-management. For a short time (between ages 16-18) however, the pressures of being a high achiever present a tough challenge for even the most committed and well-organized swimmer.

There is no doubt that School Years 11 and 12 are a challenging time for all students.

- What is happening during Years 11 and 12?
- You are growing and developing physically
- You are thinking about getting a part-time job and saving money
- You are thinking about finding a boyfriend or girlfriend
- You would probably like to learn to drive
- You are studying hard for the most important exams of your life AND....

At the same time you are trying to complete one of the big jumps in your swimming development: the jump from AGE GROUP to OPEN LEVEL competition.

### **All this happening at once!**

You are basically being asked to mature into adulthood, be a student of excellence and progress your swimming to senior levels within a period of two years.

It is tough! It's so tough that many do not successfully achieve their goals in any one area let alone all of them.

The frustration usually comes from having to compromise and sacrifice in one area to benefit another. Swimmers often take the option to drop a few swim sessions to concentrate on Year 12 studies.

True, this makes more time available for study, but the high achiever also finds it frustrating that whilst **grades** are improving, they feel like a "brick" in the water and years of training and preparation seem to be wasted. Unfortunately many swimmers find

it just too tough to come back after the decreased training loads and **never** make it back to pre year 12 performance levels.

Several schools offer the opportunity to spread Year 11 and 12 over three years. This an excellent option for some students as it allows enough time to sustain high levels of academic achievement and maintain training at a reasonable level. The down side is that the extra year of High School means many of your friends graduate and move on while you are still studying. It means making new school friends and adjusting to a new set of circumstances. Also, some swimmers taking the extra year option end up doing worse in their academic life, as they adopt a more relaxed attitude to study believing there is no urgency.

However, **YOU CAN DO IT**. You can achieve academic and athletic success. Success is your choice and as with all things, success comes from being positive, being disciplined and committed to the achievement of goals and remaining focussed and motivated during the tough times.

Several top swimmers and many great Australian athletes have completed their education and still excelled in their sport. Australian Marathon great Rob De Castella won several major races whilst completing his study at University.

In swimming, Olympic Gold Medallist David Thiele is a specialist medical practitioner and completed his medical studies whilst training for the 1960 Olympic Games. Commonwealth Games medallist Tim Ford is a lawyer. Olympic Gold medallist Michelle Ford has a degree and distance swimmer Chloe Flutter (8:32 800 freestyle) last year was awarded a Rhodes scholarship to study at Oxford University in England. Commonwealth Games Gold medallist Marty Roberts has a sports science degree and more recently Chris Fydler has completed not one but TWO degrees whilst maintaining his status as one of the nation's top sprinters. Michael Klim excelled during his final year of high school with outstanding grades and has performed magnificently in major international swimming competitions since.

The good news is that swimmers have a distinct advantage over most of their fellow students. The discipline, personal management, time management and goal-orientated skills developed during swimming training are the same skills necessary to successfully complete academic studies. The techniques you use everyday to get the most out of swimming training are the same skills that will help you achieve the grades you want at school.

It is imperative that any efforts towards excellence in Year 11 and 12 are supported by coach, family and friends. The support of the coach and the understanding of family and friends is a key factor in the success of any plan to do well as a swimmer and as a student in the final years of High School.

**Some practical hints:**

● **You** are in control of your study and training program. Regardless of

what your school friends say or do, success in the end is your decision. Do the training and study that you need to do to get the results you want. If your friends think studying is not "cool", get some new friends!

● What **might** happen and what **could** happen is not as important as what **is** happening **right now**. Don't worry about the exams at the end of the year. Focus on doing the little things right, everyday, every class, each assignment. (WIN THE WORKOUT principle in the classroom!!!)

● 90% of stress comes from **not** doing things when you should have done them. The best time to start a study program is TODAY.

● An extra hour study each day is an extra day study each week- **You can control time!** It's never too late to be the person you wanted to be.

● Take care of the **immediate** and the **ultimate** will take care of itself.

● No matter what happens there is **another way** to look at it. **Nothing** is as bad as it first seems.

● What if something goes wrong? Have a **plan**, Have a **second plan** and have a **backup plan to the second plan**. Don't plan to fail by failing to plan.

● **NEVER, EVER, Give up** - there is always a way. Develop an "**I can**" strategy rather than saying "**I can't**".

● Success is never guaranteed, but **you can choose** to increase the likelihood of success by adopting a study program and swimming training schedule that will allow you the best opportunity to succeed.

● The difference between ordinary and extraordinary is the little extra. Try 30 minutes LESS T.V. per day and do 30 minutes EXTRA on math equations. Try 30 minutes LESS video games per day and learn five EXTRA new words to help with reading and comprehension. Those little EXTRAs add up to EXTRA-ORDINARY results.

The smartest people don't necessarily get the best year 12 grades just as the most talented swimmers don't always win. It is more likely that the best grades (and gold medals) go to the students (and swimmers) who have prepared the best, who have committed themselves to a daily routine where excellence is the **minimum** acceptable standard and who manage their time and themselves most effectively.

There are a lot of similarities between swimming well and passing Year 12 exams. Preparation is important. Planning is crucial. Confidence is vital. Time management - essential. For all swimmers however, none of these concepts is new. They are things you

grow up with, things you utilize every day. In many ways your swimming career has prepared you for the opportunity to do well in Year 12. All the attributes you need to be a great student you have already developed as a swimmer. You have a competitive edge.

Make the most of it.