

## **9 Tips to Achieve your Open Water Swimming Goals** **with Shelley Taylor-Smith, 7-time World Marathon Swimming Champion 1988-95** [www.championmindset.com.au](http://www.championmindset.com.au)

Well it is that time of the season where you have either completed a couple of races or you are getting ready for the first open water swim. Now it is time to leave the comforts of that nice, clear, warm community swimming pool. I have compiled a list of a few tips that might make that experience a little less stressful.

One of the first things to consider would be the difference in open water swimming versus the pool where you probably have done most of your training. **The big variable in open water swimming would be the conditions.** You would rarely have ½ to 1m waves or 50 other swimmers in your swim lane at your swim workout.

The best tip for handling some of the conditions is experience. The more that you have been exposed to various conditions in open water the more comfortable you will feel on race day. So with that being said here are a few additional tips to consider:

**1. The Wetsuit or Swimsuit** - A proper fitting and FINA approved swimsuit can improve your swim time or more due to increased buoyancy and decreased drag.

For triathletes wetsuits will notice these benefits. Not to mention a wetsuit will help keep you warm in colder water. You can also use cooking spray on the outside of the suit (forearms and shins) to aid in removal. (Don't use petroleum base sprays or lubricants, due to the detrimental effects on the suit)

**2. Getting Ready to Swim** - most people will overlook the need to warm up prior to an open water swim. It's generally a good idea to do some light stretching 45 minutes prior to the race. As you enter the water let some water to enter the suit, this will allow your body to warm the water and thus keeping you warm for the rest of the swim. A series of easy, gliding strokes (100m) towards the first buoy will help with warming up your swim muscles.

After you have done this a couple of times, for additional warming up do a couple of quick sprints toward the first buoy to simulate the start of the race.

**3. On Your Mark** - Are you ready to start the race? I would recommend trying to avoid that "centre field" "middle of the pack" position. I think we have all had the occasion where we were in the middle of the pack on the swim start. It's difficult to get into a rhythm and you will expend a lot of energy swimming over, around, and through other swimmers.

I would suggest an outside start position with a clear line to the first buoy. It may add a few metres to the swim distance but most likely will eliminate a few seconds from your time. If this is your first open water swim, it may be less stressful to start at the back of the pack and just enjoy the tranquil water. If you are an experienced swimmer and train with Ian Thorpe, front line, poll position would most likely be right for you!

**4. Draft Legal** - The nice thing about open water swimming is that it is draft legal. It will reduce your overall effort to tuck in behind your buddy that you know is a slightly faster swimmer. If you are close enough to feel the bubbles of their feet you are in a prime drafting position. Just a few points of courtesy, don't tap their feet and be sure to thank them on the way to Transition1 if you're a triathlete or as after passing through the finish line.

**5. Open Water Sighting** - There are many schools of thought on open water sighting. It certainly is a key to proper navigation. Lifting your head, even slightly will cause your hip and legs to drop and that's a drag (literally). So it's a trade off, sight too often you will slow down, not enough and you may get off course. A good school of thought would be to sight every 5 or 6 strokes. If you have a naturally straight swimming stroke you may go to every 10 strokes.

Most will sight as they are exhaling, then lower their eyes back into the water, turn to the side for a normal breath. The key will be to only lift your eyes high enough to see the buoy or other landmark that you are using for sighting. It's good to practice this move in the pool. A good drill is to swim with your eyes closed on the middle 15 yards of the 25yrd length and open your eyes when you are going to sight. Try doing this every 3rd stroke to get the feel of sighting and closing your eyes will give you the sensation of swimming in murky water. A word of caution, notice I said only the middle 15 yards, because the wall at the end of the pool is not very forgiving.

**6. Know the Course** – Prior to the swim start check out the layout of the course. Locate the first and last buoys, wave conditions, swim direction, sun direction, etc. It is often beneficial to site those first buoys from water level so you will know what they will look like when the swim segment starts.

**7. Learn to breathe on both sides** – Not only does it split the effort of your lats, but it's good to be able to turn away from the sun, wind and waves while swimming with clear goggles.

**8. The Last 100 Metres – rounding of the last Turn Buoy to the Finish Line** - You are almost finished, see it wasn't so bad! This part of the swim will get you prepared for the next segment of the race if you are a triathlete. So far you have been using primarily your upper body muscle group. Now it's time to bike, which is primarily lower body. How many of you what is known as the "T1 Tango", most of the blood hasn't made it to your quads so when you are jogging to Transition1, it kind of looks like a dance or maybe a stagger. To help get the blood to move to the lower extremities increase your kick the last 100 metres of the swim. This will help you get your "bike legs" quicker. Keep swimming until your hand touches the sand or bottom of the swim venue, then you will be able to stand up and gallop out of the water. If you are wearing a wetsuit you can start peeling down the top to save some time at Transition1.

**9. Enjoy** – And finally a must at all times is to have fun along the way!