

USMS Coaches Committee June 14, 2026 Webinar



Preparing Your Swimmers for Open Water Success

A few stats on Marcia:

- 40+ Years of Open Water Swimming Experience.
 - (Fearful for only the first 15.)
- Extensive open water resumé as a Swimmer and a Coach ([MC Bio](#)).
- [Oceans Seven](#): 36th Person, completed over 31 Years, 1994-2025.
- Honor Swimmer, International Marathon Swimming Hall of Fame.
- Her book, *Dover Solo*, and website [DoverSolo.com](#) continue to provide guidance to aspiring Open Water swimmers.
- Chair of the USMS Long Distance/Open Water Committee 2001-2009.
- Founder and Head Coach of North Shore Masters in suburban Chicago.
- Swims because it makes her happy.
- Marcia is far from done.

What we're Going to Talk About

1. The Most Important Thing in Open Water Swimming.
2. Pool workouts applicable to Open Water Training and Racing.
3. Pool Drills applicable to Open Water Swimming.
4. Managing Emotions and Anxiety.
5. Swim Gear Options.
6. Racing Tactics.

There are many more topics so a question-and-answer period will follow.

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*The Most
Important Thing
in Open Water
Swimming:
SAFETY SAFETY
SAFETY SAFETY*

Mother Nature is ALWAYS in Charge.

- If today is not your day, get out.
- The Variables and Considerations of Open Water Swimming:
 - Temperature
 - Water Conditions
 - Surf
 - Chop
 - Currents
 - Visibility
 - Marine Life
 - Boat Traffic
 - Fear Factor

Pool workouts applicable to Open Water

- LONGEST POOL SWIM DISTANCES: 1500 meters/1650 yards
- These distances are (mostly) the shortest OW Distances.
- Need to train for ENDURANCE, with low rest to simulate race.
- Determine Stroke Count for the length of the pool & Tempo
- Sets of uninterrupted Repeats:
 - 20 x 100s, 10-20 x 200s, 10 x 500s etc.
 - These are good to do sometimes but they get boring fast.
 - So we switch it up:

North Shore
Masters:
OHP Pace
Work

Saturday Jan 10, 2026

ALL { 400 Sw · 100 K · 200 Pull · 100K

4x50 Sw or K/SW 3800 7500

<u>OHP</u>	<u>PACE</u>	
2x 100 /:30		} 400 Sw Neg Split
3x 100 /:30		
4x 100 /:30		
5x 100 /:30		
100 ez		
x =		300
		200
		100
		<u>100 ez</u>
		100 Sw Neg Split
		200 or P
		300
		400
	15	} 100 ez

North Shore Masters : Descending 400s

Sat May 9, 2026
4x (150 Choice + 50K) 800

678 6x 150/100 Pull 2:15-2:30
desc 1-3, 4-6
Br 3 on odd 25s, 50^{evens}

707 50 ez 950
5x 400 or 300 (stroke. 1M) 1750

- #1: strait ~6:00-6:30
- #2: 2x 200/150 3:00-3:10
- #3: NEG split ~6:00-6:30
- #4: 4x 100/75 1:30/1:40/... +:60 rest
- #5: strait FAST 100 ez

1:45 FINS: 2x (8x 50 + 50 ez) 100 ez

odds 60-55-50-45 or 55-50-45-40
evens: 45 or 40

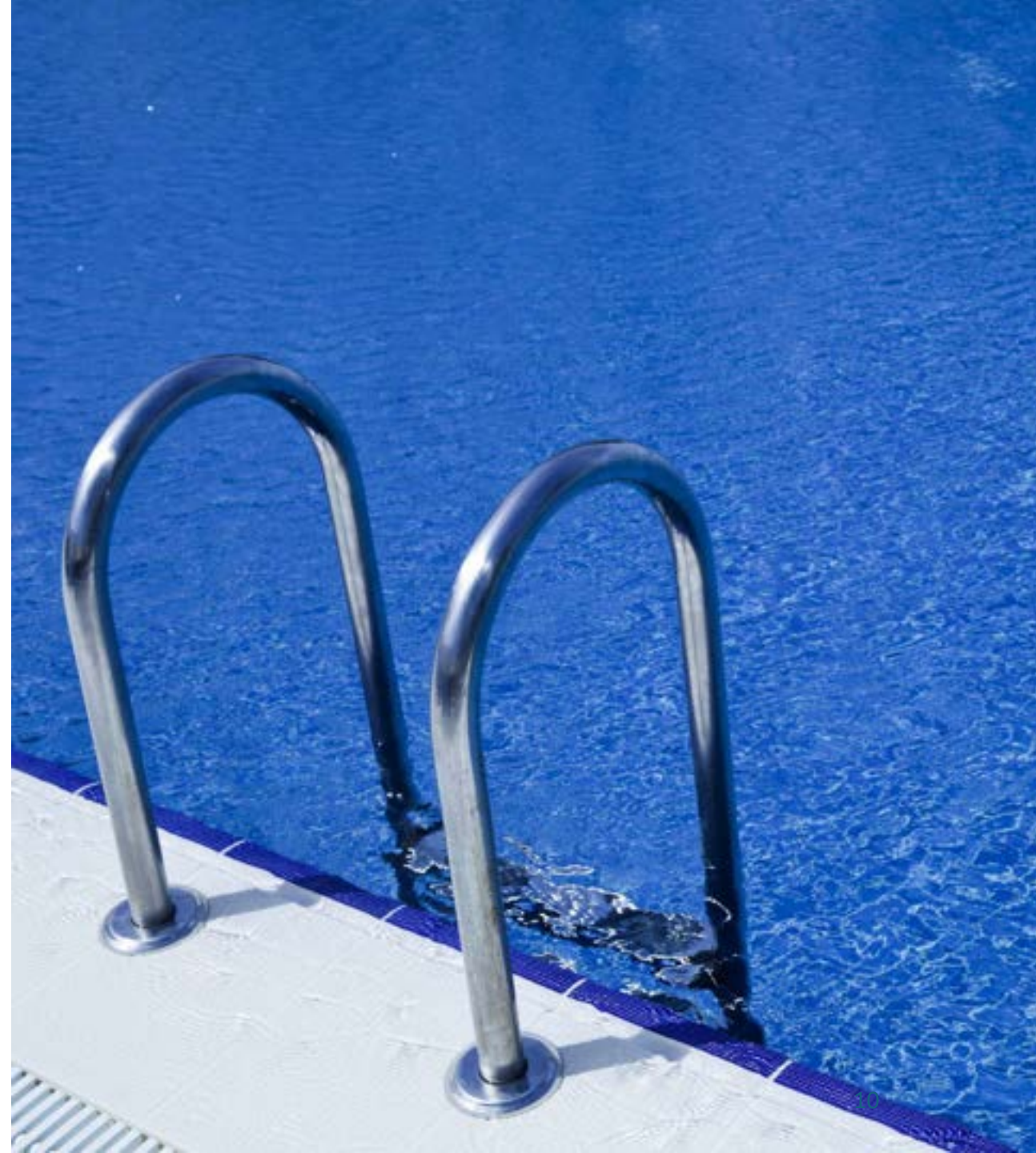
	60 → 45	55 → 40
leave on	:60 1	:60
	60 2	55
	45 3	35
	40 4	25
	25 5	05
	15 6	50
	00 7	30
	45 8	10
	30 end	50
	1:30 ez	1:10

→ send offs for these 50's

4800

MC: Recent set of Descending 200s + 100s

- 800 Warmup, 4 x 50 Swim
- 4x (200 Desc + 250 Steady), :30 Rest then 200 AFAP
 - Interval 3:00 + 4:00
- 100 EZ
- 4x (100 Desc + 150 Steady), :30 Rest then 100 AFAP
 - Interval 1:30 + 2:30
- 100 EZ + 800 Kick w/ Fins
Total Distance: 5100



Pool Drills for Open Water Swimming: Sighting



- Sighting is the most difficult skill in Open Water Swimming.
- Practice Head-up: “Alligator Eyes”
 - Lift your head up just enough so your goggles are above the waterline, not your whole head. (5-10 strokes?)
 - Sight on something BIG, that is NOT MOVING, such as a BUILDING, TREE, LIGHT POST
 - "How often should I sight?" As often as you need to but don't use it as an excuse for stopping.
 - You don't need to read the fine print: just catch a glimpse of it and head that way.
 - Don't multi-task, i.e. only sight, don't breathe too.
 - Options: Sight before or after your breath.

Pool Drills for Open Water Swimming: Turning

- Turning Styles: Laterally repositioning your body into a new direction.
- Corkscrew Turns are most effective to get around race buoys. This type of turn keeps up momentum in the hips.
 - In a pool (or open water) have a “Person” (or stable object) be The Buoy.
 - Have Swimmers swim to one side of the Buoy then execute a Corkscrew turn.
 - The last freestyle stroke before the turn is the arm closest to the Buoy (“Arm A”). If you do it with the arm on the outside, you spin away from the Buoy.
 - Backstroke with “Arm B” as the next stroke so the swimmer flips onto the back.
 - Next, take a freestyle stroke with Arm A, flipping over again, creating a “Corkscrew”.
 - Do this as many times as needed to get around the buoy.

Pool Drills for Open Water Swimming: Breathing

- Bilateral Breathing allows a Swimmer to view 360° easily.
- Unless there is a medical reason why a person is unable to bilaterally breathe.....
- Practice with “Catch up Drill”
- Slow 25s/50s of Breathing Every 3 or 5.
- Keep Practicing....

Pool Drills for Open Water Swimming: Finish

- Finish Practice
- In-water Finishes are less common. It's usually a short dash up the beach.
- In Shallow end of the pool (3 feet or so...), have swimmers get out and walk/run (if safe) to a spot 10-yards away.
- Alternatively, on dry land, from Push-up/Plank position, bring knees to hands quickly ("Squat Thrust") and stand up then walk forward 10-yds.
- One's Blood Pressure has to readjust quickly.

Managing Anxiety: Pre-Race and more

- There are a 100 million reasons to be anxious before a race.
- Pre-race Anxiety is VERY VERY common.
- Experience helps but in order to get this experience, you need to get THROUGH this first race.
- Have you practiced enough? Do you feel confident you can complete the distance?
- Are you worried about the start? Positioning helps.
- Are you worried about Marine Life? What is down there? Things with Teeth, (It's not coming for YOU, it's coming for ME...) Seaweed, Jellies, Jetsam, Flotsam.
- Stay with the pack or at least one other person. (Security in numbers.)
- Be Grateful that you have the ability to even begin this swim.

Managing Anxiety: Panic Attacks

- In-Water Panic Attack:
 - You need to gain control & get yourself in a position to get the most air possible, which means a straight trachea. (Straw analogy)
- Roll on your back, kick your feet & "insect" your arms. Take some deep breaths.
- When you feel confident, resume swimming on your stomach.
- Make a deal with yourself, such as "I'm going to do 10 strokes on my stomach then roll on my back and take 3 deep breaths."

Swim Gear: GOGGLES

- Goggles: Dark & Light – Have a pair of both for variable conditions.
- Whatever style fits YOU is right for YOU.
- Pre-fitted. Test them in practice then **DON'T ADJUST THEM!**
- Strap under or over Cap?
- Defogger (Water Bucket)

Swim Gear: BUOY

- Swim with a Safer Swim Buoy.
 - Definitely in practice. Sometimes in Races.
- Preferably one that's a Dry Bag (to stow valuables)
- 15-24" is PLENTY BIG
- Neon Color.



Swim Gear: Bathing Suit/Wet Suit, Ear Plugs

- Bathing Suit & Wet Suit
- Does it fit comfortably?
- Consider Rub Spots.
- Consider Strap Widths.
- Consider Water Temperature – Hot and Cold
- Would Earplugs make a difference?
 - Mack's Silicone Earplugs

Swim Gear: Caps

- In Open Water Swimming, a Swim Cap is an ESSENTIAL piece of safety equipment. Choose one in a light color so you are more visible.
- Three Choices – Personal Preference
 - Latex – Tightest Fit, Least Warmth
 - Silicone – Good Fit, Good Warmth
 - Neoprene – Good Fit, Most Warmth – Some races will not allow Neoprene
- Check with the race to see if you can wear one or two caps, if that matters.
- If you do wear more than one cap, wear warmest cap next to head and layer up from there:
Neoprene/Silicone/Latex

Racing Tactics: Starts

- Start Situation: In-water? Beach? Mass? Wave?
- Note the terrain: Steep, Flat, Rocky, etc.
- If it's an out-and-back course, turn around and look where and what you are coming back to. Visual Cues to Finish.
- Position: You decide based on your ability & comfort level.
- Be READY! Float on stomach if you can. If vertical, lurch forward to get moving.

Racing Tactics: Turns, Strokes, Pickups, Finish

- Turns: Keep your momentum going forward via your best turn option: Corkscrew or Lateral? Close to the buoy or go wide? Stay out of traffic.
- Count Strokes, knowing that your current pace translate into what you practiced in the pool.
- Pick ups: Vary effort ("25 Strokes moderate/25 Strokes FAST")
 - This also helps with Anxiety.
- Finish: Turn around at the start to look where & what you are coming back to.
 - What are you going to sight on specifically?
 - Note the terrain: Steep, Flat, Rocky, etc.
 - Swim to Absolute End. Gym Class Squat thrust to equalize Blood Pressure. Duck Walk to maintain balance.

Racing Tactics: Sighting 1

The most difficult aspect of Open Water Swimming.

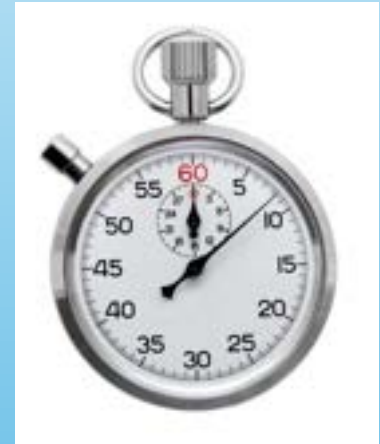
- Variables include:
 - Water Conditions
 - Surf
 - Chop
 - Currents
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 - Fear Factor

Racing Tactics: Sighting 2

- Practice Head-up: “Alligator Eyes”
 - Lift your head up just enough so your goggles are above the waterline, not your whole head. (5-10 strokes?)
 - Sight on something BIG, that is NOT MOVING, such as a BUILDING, TREE, LIGHT POST
 - "How often should I sight?" As often as you need to but don't use it as an excuse for stopping.
 - You don't need to read the fine print: just catch a glimpse of it and head that way.
 - Don't multi-task, i.e. only sight, don't breathe too.
 - Options: Sight before or after your breath.

Quick Recap

1. *The Most Important Thing in Open Water Swimming:*
SAFETY
2. *Pool workouts applicable to Open Water Training and Racing:*
ENDURANCE SETS WITH LOW REST, STROKE RATE & TEMPO,
NEGATIVE SPLIT & DESCENDING SETS
3. *Pool Drills applicable to Open Water Swimming:*
SIGHTING, TURNS, BREATHING, FINISH
4. *Managing Emotions and Anxiety:*
PRE-RACE, DURING RACE
5. *Swim Gear Options:*
GOGGLES, SWIM BUOYS, SUITS, CAPS, EAR PLUGS
6. *Racing Tactics:*
START, TURN, STROKES, PICKUPS, FINISH, SIGHTING



Thank you for participating!

Any Questions?

