

Work as a Team

How do you coach an athlete following a DNF?

Athletes are most often emotionally lost following a negative performance, and I think it is an important time to truly coach. I'm not a fan of simply rebuilding an athlete's confidence by smothering him or her with praise. I like to take a step back with the athlete and assess the preparation, strategies and all things good and bad in the big picture of the program. Coaching is a relationship, and the dynamic should be that of a team, not a dictatorship. An outcome of this team evaluation might be that there is nothing to change—sometimes bad performances just happen. But more often than not there are a couple of tweaks and evolutions that will come out of the overall approach.

Forcing the athlete to look back at the journey so far, as well as ahead to the missions still needing to be completed, can be invigorating and motivational. DNFs always happen for a reason, but they are seldom as catastrophic as they feel on race day.

I don't have regular access to open water—what are some race-specific sessions I can do in the pool?

Going to the pool and doing laps and drills at one intensity will do very little for your performance. You must train to be an open-water swimmer. Here are a few things that can help:



BY MATT DIXON



How can I prepare for competition in very hot conditions?

There's nothing better than true acclimatization, with a period of training and living in the environment in which you'll be racing. A few days will make little real physiological difference; extended weeks are necessary to have full impact. But if living at the race site is not possible, as is the case for most of us, there are a few things you can try.

Post-workout saunas are a good idea and stimulate a boost in blood volume, especially if completed before rehydrating. You can also do your lighter workouts in hotter conditions (while maintaining hydration).

On race day the conditions place an additional stress on the system—if not acclimatized, you will experience higher than normal heart rates, and quickly rising core temperature. Race with a more conservative approach: Dial back the pace, be more patient and race with a building strategy. To help offset the effects, experiment with reflective clothing (yes, white and reflective clothing do make a difference), and ensure your hydration and fueling strategy is dialed in. Finally, cool your core temperature. Dousing your wrists, armpits and shoulders with cool water will help.

- **Race simulation sets:** Start sets of 200s, 300s or 400s fast (90–95 percent effort) then settle into race pace, then finish fast. Or try a series of 50s: Do a dive start off the deck, then a fast 50, then climb back onto the deck to help familiarize yourself with the discomfort of a race start. Follow it with an extended swim at race pace.

- **Drafting:** If you're able to swim with a few friends, do a series of fast 25s or 50s and simulate race drafting. Practice swimming with three of you across a lane, which will allow you to get comfortable racing in close proximity to others.

- **Sighting:** Many athletes never practice the pure mechanics of sighting. Swim race-pace efforts while picking a target to "sight" on each lap. Remember, sighting is not just a head raise; you must raise your head and actually see the target to sight.

If you're *really* lucky, you have a forward-thinking coach who will pull the lane lines out to drop real buoys in the pool for open-water simulation. 📍

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