

# USING THE PACE CLOCK

By John Quintana



A quintessential element of success in competitive swimming is to decrease the elapsed time for a particular swim event. Everything a coach does in helping train a competitive swimmer is based upon shaving tenths of seconds off a swimmers previously recorded time. This being the case it's understandable why a primary tool of the competitive swimmer is the ever present pace clock.

The pace clock is an integral part of a swimmer's experience at practice. Every workout is governed by specific time intervals for rest, swim repeats, monitoring heart rates, etc. Therefore, it's important for you or your child to begin understanding the use of the clock as soon as possible.

This cognitive skill may take some time for new swimmers to grasp. Your child may have some frustration over this or may simply try to avoid the skill (understandably) and wait for others to tell him/her when and what to swim. The coach will expect your child to learn this skill quickly, as without it, workouts with 5-9 swimmers per lane can be chaos. A list of examples of how a pace clock is used during a workout follows:

Since all swimming sets and races will refer to distance, the translation of distance to lengths is basic concept that needs to be understood. For the following set a short course pool (25-yards) is assumed: 100-yards is 4 lengths, 500-yards is 20 lengths and a 1650 (mile swim) is 66 lengths.

**T30: Swim as many lengths as possible within a 30-minute period.**

A pretty basic set which is used to gauge endurance periodically.

**Warmup: 3 \* 200 Swim Freestyle @ 30 seconds Rest 600 Yards**

Which means for the swimmer to Swim Freestyle 8 lengths of the 25 yard pool with a 30 second break when each 8 lengths (200 yards) is completed.

**Freestyle Set 5 \* 100 Freestyle @ 2:00 Interval 500 Yards**

Which means for the swimmer to Swim Freestyle 4 lengths of the 25-yard pool. The swimmer must remember when he/she left on the pace clock and regardless how fast he/she swam, the swimmer will leave 2 minutes after the previous start. So this set will be take 10 minutes to complete.

**Stroke Set 5 \* 50 Breaststroke @ 3:00 Interval, Descending Series 250 Yards**

Which means for the swimmer to Swim Breaststroke 2 lengths of the 25-yard pool. The swimmer must check the clock and know the time it took to swim the 50 yards and then swim the next 50 yards faster than the previous. This set will take 15 minutes to complete.

The above sets are simple examples. A more complex example follows:

**Stroke Set 6 \* 125 Individual Medley (50 fly) @ 2:20 Interval 750 Yards**

Which means for the swimmer to swim the 125 yards Individual Medley (50 Fly, 25 Back, 25 Breast, 25 Free). Having 2 minutes and 20 seconds to complete the swim, before starting the next swim in the series. This set will be completed in 14 minutes.

How the clock would be used. The swimmer would begin each swim as follows:

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> 125 | Second hand (RED) on the 60 (called the top), Minute Hand (Black) on the 5. |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> 125 | Second hand on the 20, Minute hand past the 7                               |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> 125 | Second hand on the 40, Minute hand before the 10                            |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> 125 | Second Hand on the TOP, Minute hand on the 12                               |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> 125 | Second Hand on the 20, Minute hand past the 14                              |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> 125 | Second Hand on the 40, Minute hand before the 17                            |

The variations and combinations are endless, limited only by the imagination of the trainer. I hope these examples have given the reader some understanding as to the use of the pace-clock within training for competitive swimming.