



Thursday, April 15, 2010

✘ The Good, The Bad & the Weedy

It's that time of year to leave the warmth, comfort, and predictability of our swimming pools and think about venturing back out into the open waters of lakes and rivers. I always get an onslaught of questions from athletes who are a bit worried when it comes to open water swimming (OWS). Here are some most frequently asked questions and my responses.

Q) Why can't I just keep swimming in a pool?

A) If all the races you plan to do are going to be in a pool, then keep training in a pool. But keep in mind that OWS provides opportunities to become a stronger and more well rounded swimmer.

Q) I can't see the bottom and that freaks me out. What do I do?

A) Swim along the shore or in a protected cove. If you start to panic, just stand up.

Q) What if I am not near shore and I start to panic?

A) Look up and find the closest route to shore. Then while you swim in that direction, occupy your mind by counting strokes. When you get to 25, start over and count again.

Q) What about snakes?

A) Snakes are not sitting around waiting to attack. They don't like us as much as we don't like them. All the splashing and water motion you create while swimming is enough to send them the message that

you are coming and they will move out of the way.

Q) What if I get tangled up in weeds?

A) Scout out an OWS area beforehand for weeds and look for ways to avoid the weedy patches. If you find yourself in the middle of a weed field, you can always do a shallow breaststroke while you maneuver yourself into open water.

Q) Can I swim alone?

A) You can, BUT I do NOT recommend it. Always swim with at least one other person and make sure you keep an eye on each other.

Q) Can I get a workout in while swimming in a lake?

A) Yes. Practice fast swim starts or add intervals to your swim set (50 strokes fast, 25 strokes recovery or swim buoy to buoy alternating fast/easy). Plus the extra resistance from the waves will help strengthen your overall stroke.

Q) Do I need a wetsuit?

A) No. But if you don't like cold water or are not used to it, a wetsuit can certainly provide extra warmth, not to mention extra buoyancy and a layer of protection from weeds, etc.

Q) What are the benefits of OWS?

A) OWS allows you to practice things that can't be done well or at all in a pool, such as: sighting, navigation, swimming in choppy water, swimming in currents, learning and utilizing bilateral breathing based on the sun and wave direction. Plus it builds your overall swim confidence.

There are many more questions around OWS but the bottom line is to grab a buddy and just do it. The benefits are huge and you will become a better, more skilled swimmer. Plus if you can get comfortable in open water, it makes race day that much easier.

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at [8:13 AM](#)



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