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Backstroke Progression

1. Streamlining

Hand on top of hand; head between arms; on tiptoes; stretching towards top. Have swimmers do either standing on pool deck or pool bottom. “They must push off every wall into a Streamline position”

- **BODY POSITION** – Teach and emphasize the (3) elements of a good body position for the backstroke.
 1. Head position – Steady, solid head position with head laid back in the water.
 2. High chest & stomach – keep the chest and stomach up; keeping a good head position will help with this.
 3. Fast, steady flutter kick – small, fast kicks on the water surface (“Boil Water”); again good head position will help to keep the kick on the surface.
- **POWER KICKING** – Push off of wall in a streamline position; begin to flutter kick and get to surface and continue to kick on surface. Remind and emphasize the (3) points of good body position. Swimmers should work with their head position (“tilt head back”) to help them keep a high chest and stomach position and to help keep their flutter kicks on the surface (“Boil Water”).
- **Introduce the Backstroke flags**

2. Backstroke kicking with a kick board

- Backstroke Flutter Kicking on a Kick Board. Board held at bottom with board extended down over the knees. Emphasize “good body position”. Emphasize “Small, fast kicks! When kicking backstroke there should be very little knee bend. By kicking with the board down over knees it will help the swimmer to get the proper legs while doing the kick. Have swimmers inside of backstroke flags to extend one arm straight back as continue to kick to the wall.
- Swimmer may also extend the board above the head with straight arms and do a backstroke flutter kick.

3. Double Over-arm Backstroke

- Have swimmer push off of wall on back in a streamline position with flutter kicking. Have swimmer swim with both arms simultaneously. The emphasis on this drill should be do work on smooth (“pinkie first”) entries with straight arm entry slightly above and outside the shoulders. Once both hands enter they should catch water with nice “high elbows” and basically “arm wrestle the water with the press ending my pushing the water down under their hips (“arms should be straight at the end of the press. Then they must recover with the top of the hands lifting out of the water with straight-armed recoveries. As the arms are recovering the hand should rotate to a position where the pinky will enter the water first at the top of the stroke. Emphasize “body position, smooth entries, and straight arm recoveries”.

4. One arm backstroke with non swimming arm along side

- Have swimmer after push-off drop one arm along side and swim only with the other arm. Rotation of the shoulders and hips can now be emphasized. Again also emphasize “body position, smooth entries (“pinkie first”), & straight arm recoveries”. As the hand enters into the water the body should rotate to that arm side so that the initial catch begins well below the surface of the water. Upon catching the water the elbow

should bend into a high elbow position. The hand should then begin to push the water back towards the surface and then turn the hand back towards the bottom and complete the press by pushing the underneath the rotating hip. “So as the swimmer completes the arm stroke the body should be rotating back to the other side”. As the swimmer completes the arm stroke with a “downward” push of the hand; the arm (“STRAIGHT ARM”) should lift out of the water with the top of the hand leaving first. As the arm (“STRAIGHT ARM”) recovers the hand should slowly rotate so that at the top of the recovery the pinky is positioned to enter the water first. AND again the hand should enter just outside the shoulder with an extended arm.

- Have the swimmer do the same with the other arm along the side and swim only with the other arm.

5. One arm backstroke with non swimming arm extended above shoulder

- Same concept as drills above but have the swimmer now swim with the non-swimming arm extended above the shoulder. Emphasis should still be on the same as above. The swimmer may now concentrate more on what the swimming arm is actually doing during the entire cycle of the stroke. Again also emphasize “body position, smooth entries (“pinky first”), & straight arm recoveries”. As the hand enters into the water the body should rotate to that arm side so that the initial catch begins well below the surface of the water. Upon catching the water the elbow should bend into a high elbow position. The hand should then begin to push the water back towards the surface and then turn the hand back towards the bottom and complete the press by pushing the underneath the rotating hip. “So as the swimmer completes the arm stroke the body should be rotating back to the other side”. As the swimmer completes the arm stroke with a “downward” push of the hand; the arm (“STRAIGHT ARM”) should lift out of the water with the top of the hand leaving first. As the arm (“STRAIGHT ARM”) recovers the hand should slowly rotate so that at the top of the recovery the pinky is positioned to enter the water first. AND again the hand should enter just outside the shoulder with an extended arm.
- Have the swimmer do the same with the other arm extended above the shoulder and swim only with the other arm.

6. Regular backstroke

- Now have the swimmer swim with both arms. A backstroke swimmer should always keep the arms moving (“like a windmill on a windy day”). Backstroke should always have one hand entering the water at the top of the stroke as the other hand exits the water at the bottom of the stroke. Remember to emphasize head position, high chest and stomach, and fast, small flutter kicking. As a swimmer swims the backstroke the body (“shoulders and hips”) should be rotating as the swimmer swims.
- Emphasize “Long, Smooth Swimming”. “Hold and feel” the water from the catch at the top of the stroke through the “Power Phase” (catch through the release). Remember to emphasize “Acceleration” of the “Power Phase” of the stroke. “0 – 100 miles per hour”. And most importantly remember that when they are entering and reaching before the catch at the top of the stroke that the body should be rotating down; as they complete the “Power Phase” of the stroke that the body should be rotating back to the other side; so that the same principle can hold true as they enter and reach with the other hand on the other side of the body. Entries into the water should be made with “No splash or noise – slice the fingertips into the water”. As they enter and reach it should be just outside the shoulder. As they accelerate through the “Power Phase” of the stroke they should “hold and feel” the water until their arm extends straight at the bottom of the stroke. “Teach them to swim at a slower, moderate speed before you have them swim fast”.
- REMEMBER TO TEACH THEM THE CONCEPT OF THE BACKSTROKE FLAGS. Count your strokes from the flags to the wall. Emphasize the importance of keeping the stroke, head position, and body position exactly the same inside the flags. A stroke count should be exactly the same for either a finish or a turn.

7. Other backstroke drills

- **Side-lying kicking** – With the bottom arm extending to the top and the upper arm along the side have them flutter kick on their side. Emphasize head position. Head must be always laying back looking towards the ceiling.
- **Snap & roll** – From a side-lying kicking position with the arm along the side have them recover with a straight arm up to the entry point at the top of stroke. Upon entry; catch with the other hand and immediately “snap roll” their body to the other side and now they have the other arm extended and other arm along the side. This may be done with pause (1-3 seconds between side changes) or as a catch-up type backstroke. Emphasize the “Power phase” of the stroke and pulling pattern should be similar to arm wrestling.
- **Pause drills** – Have swimmers hold their recoveries at a 90-degree angle (“hand pointing at the ceiling”) for 1-2 pause. While pausing on the recovery the other hand may make a temporary pause in the catch or initial power phase of the stroke.
- **Shoulder rotation drill** – Have swimmer swim a regular backstroke but have them rotate the shoulder to their chin (“HEAD DOES NOT MOVE OR TURN; EVER!”). You may also have the swimmer pause at the moment that the shoulder rotates and touches the chin to see where their stroke should be at that point of the cycle.
- **3-3-3 backstroke** - Very simply a drill where they swim 3 right arms, followed by 3 left arms, followed by 3 regular arm cycles. Emphasize head and body position; rotation; and long, smooth swimming. This may be done with different variations on the numbers (i.e. 4-4-4). They may do this drill with either the non-swimming arm along the side or extended above the head
- **Spin Drill** – A drill that emphasizes or even exaggerates a fast arm tempo. Very good for working on breakouts or just the idea of a faster arm tempo. Very simply the swimmer comes out of their push off and swims backstroke with “SUPER FAST” arms. As they progress through this drill have them settle back into a normal arm tempo and finish swimming the length. This can be done in bursts of 10-15 yards also.

8. Backstroke should be taught with emphasis on increased tempo in the arm stroke.

- A swimmer must learn that they need to always swim at a speed that is going to get them to the other end of the pool; not at a speed that is going to cause to do more sinking than moving forward.
- Emphasis a steady arm tempo; a fast steady kick; and always a good solid head and body position.
- There is NO HEAD MOVEMENT in backstroke.
- Teach a swimmer early about the concept of dolphin kicking off of their walls.
- Teach and emphasize “STROKE COUNTS”. Use the Backstroke flags. A backstroke swimmer must keep the stroke, stroke tempo, and head and body position exactly the same all the way to the walls; whether finishing or turning.
- Remember to emphasize that the body should be “rotating” from side to side as they swim the stroke.
- Swimmers as they progress always want to be able to swim each length or distance at a faster speed (or in a lesser amount of time).