

# PRACTICE GROUP PROGRESSION (From the coaches manual)

Seahorse / Blue Ribbon B / Blue Ribbon A / Bronze / Silver / Gold

## GENERAL PROGRAM PROGRESSION AND GOALS

Each practice group is like a rung on a ladder which the swimmers climb as they learn and improve. Each level is physically harder and more mentally challenging. Swimmers may spend as long as they want in each group so it is up to the coach to encourage them and continually stress the benefits of striving to attain the next group. Details are given in the team manual ...."Definitions of Practice Groups" and "Practice Group Time Standards".

The very basic difference between the early practice groups (Seahorse and Blue Ribbon) and the later ones (Bronze/Silver/Gold) is that in the first two groups the swimmers learn the basic techniques of the strokes and swim a little. In the second, the swimmers perfect the fine points of technique and train to swim faster. The major difference is between "**swimming**" and "**training**".

The swimmer is physically challenged more in the later groups and is expected to be more aware of what he/she is doing in the water. (Meaning knowing your repeat times for a set and physically pushing yourself to be better than the day before.) Strokework will be a major part of both sessions, but in the 2nd group you are expected to remember a coaches technique suggestion for more than one or two lengths of the pool. Repetition and a variety of teaching techniques are used extensively in the first groups.

The average swimmer will spend between four and six seasons (2 or 3 years) progressing through the first 3 groups (SH, BR-B, BR-A) We don't want the swimmer to think that they will move up automatically at the end of each season. They need the goal of having to learn the strokes to move up so they'll concentrate and work hard in practice. The honor of moving up into a higher group should be stressed constantly to each swimmer and the group as a whole.

A key component to this process is the move-up meeting. When a swimmer makes all of the next groups' time standards they will ask the coach about moving up. The coach outlines the responsibilities in the next higher group (more days/week, harder practices, better concentration, etc.) and asks the swimmer if they feel they are ready. When the swimmer says they are ready we schedule a "move-up meeting" with the head coach, the swimmer, and their parents. We again outline the responsibilities in the higher group so everyone is on the same page. The swimmer may want to move up but the parents need to know, for example, that of the 5 days/week of practice offered the swimmer is required to make at least four. They may not be willing or able to get them to those four practices per week.

The "move-up" does not happen until we get the commitment from **both** the swimmer and the parents. When we do, the move-up medal is awarded to the swimmer at practice in front of their peers, their name is posted in the "Honor Box" on the bulletin board and congratulations is given in the team newsletter as well as mentioned in the next article we send to the newspaper. Moving up is a privilege they must earn, and is one of the highest honors on the team. Because of this we rarely have problems with swimmers not committed to working hard in whatever level they are in. We rarely have to move a swimmer back down because they usually don't move up until they are ready.

**The general team goal at the present time is as follows:** Within two years we will have developed to the point that Bronze, Silver, Gold groups are made up of swimmers aged 9 to 18 who have all qualified (or are close) in at least one event for LSC Age Group Championships. Bronze being the top 9—10's, Silver being the top 11—12's, and Gold being the top 13—olders. This is the ideal, however our area's limited population base and the fact that swimmers will progress at different rates mean that we will still may have (as an example) a 10

year old with AAA times swimming with a 13 year old with B times in the Bronze group. (When the difference in age of the swimmers in a group is more than 3 years, we take other factors into consideration.)

#### DIVE PROGRESSION:

Swimmers should know how to dive from the side of the pool when they join the team but this isn't imperative. They should know how to do a fair dive from the blocks by the time they move into Blue Ribbon "B". Faster dives and stronger "springs" will be taught in BR-B and beyond. Treat Seahorse swimmers who can't dive more delicately during early season as they may find diving the "scariest" part of swimming. Dives in Seahorse are very basic. (No underwater pull and glide in Breast) Teach glide and streamlining. Add finer points in BR-B and up.

#### YARDAGE (WORK) PROGRESSION:

**Seahorse** begins with 25's and 50's and works up to the longer distances like 75's and 100's when their strokes are good enough so that they won't fall apart on a longer swim. PRACTICE PERFECTION. Occasionally a timed 200 freestyle or 200 I.M. after 2 or 3 months. Stay within 600 to 1300 meters max. (of mostly strokework) in a 45 to 60 minute practice. A lot is possible with this group and on some occasions more yardage may be swum but keep giving strokework and encouragement every minute and let the weaker or younger swimmers rest if they need it. (Eg. Let them do a 25 instead of a 50 then walk back ...this lets them stay on the interval with everyone else)

**Blue Ribbon "B"** has the same emphasis on stroke technique but does more yardage and the swimmers are expected to do most of it (less leniency with allowing swimmers to rest during a set). A little less group instruction and a little more individual instruction. Repeat 50's, 75's, and 100's are swum when they're in shape. During these sets it gives you a chance to pull certain swimmers out and work with them individually. Yardage runs from 900 to 1600 meters in one hour. (Less in a 45 min. practice.)

**Blue Ribbon "A"** swimmers are introduced to sets like 4 x 200 or 8 x 100 and avarage between 1400 and 2000 yards in one hour. Example: the 1200 practice could be a set of 10 x 100 Free on 3:00 (takes 30 min.) and then 30 min. work on starts, turns, etc. An 1800 practice could consist of 10 x 100 Free and then 10 x 50 Stroke, with a 150 WU and 150 WD. Strokework becomes more individualized, with coaches talking to a different swimmer each repeat, although group instruction is still important to remind them of key skills.

**Bronze** does between 2500 and 3200 in one hour and 15 min. The higher yardage is when the sets are all Freestyle and the lower is when the majority of yards is strokework, kicking, or Breaststroke. Parents and swimmers moving to this group have been told it is the start of "training" and most will be ready but the transition may be difficult. Give LOTS of praise for physical effort, even if the times aren't there yet. This helps smooth the passage into this group. It is a big jump for many kids who are fast because of their good strokes but those good strokes can turn sloppy during a hard set. Don't let that turn into a habit.

**Silver** does between 3200 and 4500. Training is 80% and strokework is 20%. They already know they have to always do flip turns, and all pushoffs are "ear-squeeze-streamlined". Knowing the basics are a requirement for this group and both swimmer and parent agreed to this during the move up meeting.

**Gold** Gold requirements are still being defined. We have no Gold swimmers yet as the team is only two years old.

#### MOTIVATIONAL:

To move from one group to another you must have the strokes, the knowledge, and the motivation to continue to work hard. They should know what is expected of them before they move up. They must also show that they have goals that they are ready to work hard for. Moving up for prestige or because a friend is there is not a valid reason. Goals must be specific. (Eg. "***I want to get an A time in the 50 Breast and place at Regionals.***" instead of "***I want to go faster in Breast.***")

To get them to be hard working, self motivators you need to get the ball rolling by encouraging them and “planting” the seeds” with lots of talk about:

- 1.) Moving to a higher group
- 2.) Getting a “B” or an “A” time
- 3.) Placing at the state meet
- 4.) Making the 100% BEST TIMES CLUB
- 5.) Qualifying for LSC Championships .etc.

Then, once you get the ball rolling, you can sit back and let the magic happen.

#### STROKEWORK AND FUN :

Rule of thumb for the first three groups is never go two straight minutes without teaching something to someone. Repeat the correct way over and over again so it becomes natural to them. Get in the water often and demonstrate. Move their arms or legs through the stroke, use visual, verbal, and “feel” methods to get your points across. Each higher group teaches finer skills and the swimmers should be able to take instruction more easily. Swimmers in these three groups are younger and are not highly self-motivated yet so they need fun stuff on a regular basis.

One of the marks of a good coach is the way he/she makes a good workout a fun thing. (Dice sets, Pick-A-Practice, relays, Heads and Tails, etc.) Bronze and higher are more into the training aspect although stroke “brush-up” sessions are held, films and video tape are used, and the finer points of technique are explained. But this is not nearly as high a percentage as the lower groups. Bronze and Silver also need fun and games every now and then, especially if they have been working very hard.

#### THINKING:

Along with the strokework and yardage, we have to teach the swimmers all the intricate aspects of the sport from knowing how to circle swim to being able to figure out how to average your time on a set of 8 x 200 on 3:45 . This is done in a progressive manner, too. Seahorse teaches the circle swim, leaving every 5 seconds apart, letting a faster swimmer go ahead of you, how to do 10 x 25 on 1:00 or 5 x 50 on 2:00, looking at the clock whenever you finish, etc. Also stress the importance of thinking all the time about good strokes. Blue Ribbon “B” goes into figuring out tougher sets like knowing when to leave each time during a set of 10 x 50 on 1:45 or 4 x 50 on 1:15, as well as being able to figure out your time on each one. (This is easy if you leave on the :60 but tougher if you leave on the :35.)

When swimmers move up to Bronze, they should already know things like what their approximate time is for a straight 200 Free swim, or what they average on a set of 10 x 50 Free on 1:30. Bronze introduces negative splitting, broken swims, descending sets, and things that require you to be thinking all the time about pace, etc.

This will get you all started and on the same page. Our bi-weekly coaches meetings will flesh out more and answer any questions you may have. We don’t have a lot of pool time so we have to work together and be consistent so our coaching is efficient and effective.