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Breaststroke Progression

1. Dryland swimming

I would begin work on teaching the Breaststroke by teaching the kick and then the arm stroke. Both should be taught out of the water for coaches to have a more hands on approach.

- **Breaststroke Kick** – Have swimmers lay on deck in a stream line position (a towel or kick board is more comfortable for the swimmer). Get in the swimmer's mind from the beginning that they will always return to a stream line position on every stroke of Breaststroke. While laying in the stream line position have the swimmers bend their feet back to their hips. While bringing back the feet have them turn the toes outward. From that point emphasize the toes out; catching the water with the inside of legs and feet and have them bring the lower legs around a squeeze back to streamline. You can break this into steps but always emphasizing toes out and catching the water with the inside of the legs and feet. You can help the swimmers that are struggling with the above by some hand's on assistance by going through the steps by holding their feet. The biggest struggle that beginning swimmers will have will be keeping that "toes out" position; and will instead then to scissor kick. And it is much easier to work on the skill out of water instead of in the water. Even though you may want to get in the water and do the same type of thing with the feet in the water. The next step would then be to work on the kicking with a kick board in the water.
- **Breaststroke Arms** – Also while standing on the deck have the swimmers bend over at the waist and extend their arms forward so they are parallel with the deck. From this position you can break the arm stroke down by steps. Again always emphasizing that they will always end a cycle with the arms extended in a streamline position. Beginning from a palm down position have the swimmers turn the hands to about a 40 degree pitch and press outward to beyond their shoulder width and while pressing out should also be pressing on the water. The concept of pressing the "T" (The line from the middle of the head down to the belly button; crossed with the line from shoulder to shoulder – see Butterfly) is also utilized while swimming the Breaststroke. So as the hands press outward and downward they should also be pressing their "T". At the point that the hands are outside the shoulders they should quickly turn the hands downward and inward while keeping the elbow in a "High power position". As the hands press downward and inward the upper body should begin to lift upward and the hands should press inward under the chin. At the point the hands are under the chin they then should quickly extend forward while turning the palms downward while extending the arms back to the top of the stroke (This is the recovery portion on the arms stroke). As the hands reach forward the upper body should then lean or even lung forward with the reaching of the hands. At his point the should have finished the kick and the bottom is at least for spilt second back to a stream line position. While out of the water you can break this down into steps and take each step and emphasize the points listed above. The next step would be to try this in the water.

2. Breaststroke Kicking in the water with kick board

For beginners I would have the swimmer hold the board with straight arms and with the hands near the top of the board. They must also have the head looking straight forward to ensure that they are on their breast when kicking. Have them remember when kicking on a board to keep the hips up and that they should be kicking towards the back (near surface) and not at an angle down towards the bottom. And for beginners it is important to finish every kick completely (toes should meet at the bottom of the kick); and always glide briefly after each kick while the legs are together and stream line. Once on a board repetition is now the medicine tool to have them master this skill. Hopefully they all have their toes turned outward and are squeezing the water together with some force and getting some distance out every kick while they glide briefly. The ideal Breaststroke kick would have the knees slight apart and the feet always wider than the knees. The more they

master the skill the narrower the kick will become and should become more of snapping action with the lower legs. Now for those swimmers that are struggling to get the toes out there are a few things that you can try. Of course the hands on approach is always a nice method but also have the swimmer for teaching purposes make their kicks very wide. Again always emphasizing that the toes are turned outward and that they should be catching the water with the inside of the legs and the feet. Like I mentioned above the most common error is that they are scissor kicking; which usually they have one leg and foot doing the correct thing and the other is doing more of a dolphin kick. You can sometimes help this correction by having the swimmer turn their head back towards the incorrect foot and this will actually turn the body position and help to adjust the foot and toes into an outward position. But again repeating the dry land practice and just having them to a lot of breaststroke kick on a board will eventually teach them the skill.

3. Breaststroke Kicking without a board “Breaststroke power-kicking”

Have them now Breaststroke kick with their arms extended forward on the surface without a board. They must initially keep the arms straight with a hand on top of a hand. While kicking their face and head should be down in the water “looking at the bottom of the pool”. When they need to breathe it should be done after a kick and before beginning the next kick. While breathing in Breaststroke you must emphasize that the head should not move while swimming the stroke. What happens in Breaststroke is that at the downward, inward sweep on the arm stroke that the upper body will lift out of the water; and of course the head will come out of the water and that is when a breath should be taken. While doing a Breaststroke power-kick the swimmers may begin to press slight downward with the hands to help get “the lift” needed to get a breath. This press should be very slight; maybe (4) inches downward only. This is important to also emphasize because as we continue this progression we want to keep the arm stroke out in front of the body and not under it. I would have them learn to do this drill take a breathe after every kick so that they get in the pattern of that but also that slight press with the hands to get “the lift” needed to get the breath.

4. Scull-Out/Skull-In Breaststroke power-kick

Doing the same power-kicking as above they should now instead of pressing down on the hands now turn the pitch slightly outward and press out to just beyond shoulder width; while pressing the “T”; and that point they should turn the hands over and press them inward back to the starting point. It is very important that they keep this “scull-out/skull-in” close to the surface; arms straight; and extended out in front of the head. While doing this drill they may continue to work on the (2) things needed in the arm stroke. Pressing the “T” on the outward scull, and lifting the upper body on the inward scull. While doing this drill the legs should have completed the kick while sculling outward; and while sculling inward should begin to start the next kick. Timing in a Breaststroke will also have the arm stroke beginning and then adding a kick as you go through the armstroke.

6. Taking the above to a regular Breaststroke

By now having the swimmer thinking about the power position of the elbows (high with a “Slight” bend) then can start to add that elbow bend to the downward; then inward; and then upward sweep of the hands. Again emphasis on the pressing the “T”; down head position; “the lift” and the “lunge and lean” forward on the recovery. And remember that the from “the lift” position the swimmer will then lunge and lean into the recovery which really means that you have a lot of body weight lifted out of the water; and on the lunge you are shifting all that body weight to the front of the stroke; and this should also be the same time that the kick is finishing its work into it’s glide position. Timing of the stroke is always begin to press the hands outward and the “T” down; and the point that the hands turn downward and inward (and the upper body lifts) the kick should be beginning; and as the hands recover forward the kick should be in the finishing stage (the squeeze). And all this should end up in a stream line position for a split second of the stroke.

7. Regular Breaststroke

- ❖ Emphasize the timing. “Pull; kick; glide”
- ❖ Press the “T”, and “the lift”

- ❖ Keep the hips high and kick to the back; not down
- ❖ Keep the arm stroke out in front; do not pull under the body; do not have too big of a pull pattern
- ❖ Emphasize some glide; finish every stroke and kick; let the kick do it's work
- ❖ Train the stroke; both for sprinting and for distance. (2) different types of tempo and glide distance.
- ❖ Head must remain still; downward looking at the water in the lift; and inline with body especially in the glide position.
- ❖ Emphasize the power; lift; lunge; squeeze the kick.

8. Breaststroke Underwater pulls

Teach early; require that they do them. Emphasize (3) glides. 1st – the push of the wall into a stream line position; must stay tight to maximize distance and to cut down on resistance. 2nd – a Butterfly press and downward Butterfly (Dolphin) kick into a lock-out position (arms and hands along side); stress head position to cut down on resistance; stay at the same level; and of course underwater. 3rd - Slide the hands forward right against the body and at the point the fingers begin to point forward the swimmer then can take a strong Breaststroke kick that timed right should end at the point that the swimmer's hands are extend forward in a stream line position; and the head and body has just broken to the surface and the “regular stroke” begins. Pull; kick; glide.

Work on the underwater pull step by step; as above and just put it all together. Going widths of a pool with the lane rope in the middle is a good way to practice; use the lane rope as your goal to get under before you break out into the stroke.