



USING THE PACE CLOCK

By Scott Rabalais

A group of Bronze and Silver group swimmers are busy with a set of 10 x 50-yard swims on a 1:30 interval. During the set, the coach picks out swimmers and asks them their time on the last 100. The coach will likely hear a few of these responses:

- 1) Was I supposed to get my time?
- 2) Uh...:52...no...1:02
- 3) I'm not sure...
- 4) Let's see, I left on the 50 and came in on the 17.
- 5) I went the same as the swimmer next to me.

Why is reading the pace clock so important for swimmers? Practice times can tell you if you are improving. You may try to swim faster, but you won't know how you did until you read the clock.

Using the pace clock can also help swimmers set goals. If a swimmer wants to swim 5 x 100 on 2:00, with their times getting faster and they go 1:40 on the first 100, then they know their goal for the second 100 will be 1:39 or faster.

Using a pace clock also helps swimmers go on the correct intervals. If a swimmer is asked to swim a set of 10 x 50 on an interval of 1:00, they must read the clock and leave on the "0" (or "60") at the start of each 50. Without looking at the clock, the swimmer will have no idea when to leave. Or, swimmers may end up following each other, leading to a "blind-leading-the-blind" scenario. When used properly, intervals can serve as "deadlines" -- they tell us, "It's time to go!"

The Basics

At any pool, find the pace clocks. If you have trouble seeing the clocks due to poor vision, use a watch. Make sure your watch is on the same number as the group's pace clock. As a last resort, get a swimmer in your lane to assist you with send off times.

Using the pace clock can be quite simple or a little difficult. Part of the difficulty is that a pace clock uses 60-seconds. Like it or not, basic math skills are required for using the pace clock.

Straight Sets: The most basic type of interval training is the straight set. During a straight set, the distance per repeat and the interval of the repeat remain the same.

Example: 10 x 50 yards on 1:00

10 - number of repeat

50 yards - distance of each repeat

1:00 - interval for each repeat (swim + rest)

In this example, you swim 50-yards 10 times, leaving on an interval of 1:00. Each 50-yard swim will begin "on the top" in this set. The saying "on the top" comes from the second hand pointing upwards to the "0" or "60" on the clock.

Example #2: 12 x 50 on :55.

For this set, the swimmer goes "on the top" for the first 50, on the :55 for the second, then the :50 and so on. Swimmers subtract five seconds from each send off time to find the next send-off time.

Fixed Rest Sets: In a fixed rest set, the amount of rest after each repeat is the same, not matter how fast you swim.

Example: 4 x 200 yards with :30 rest.

In this example, you swim four 200s, resting :30 after each 200. This type of interval is the easiest.

Like any other swimming skill, using a pace clock takes practice. Don't give up and don't rely on others to do the work for you. In the long run, you'll be a smarter and more motivated swimmer if you understand the pace clock.