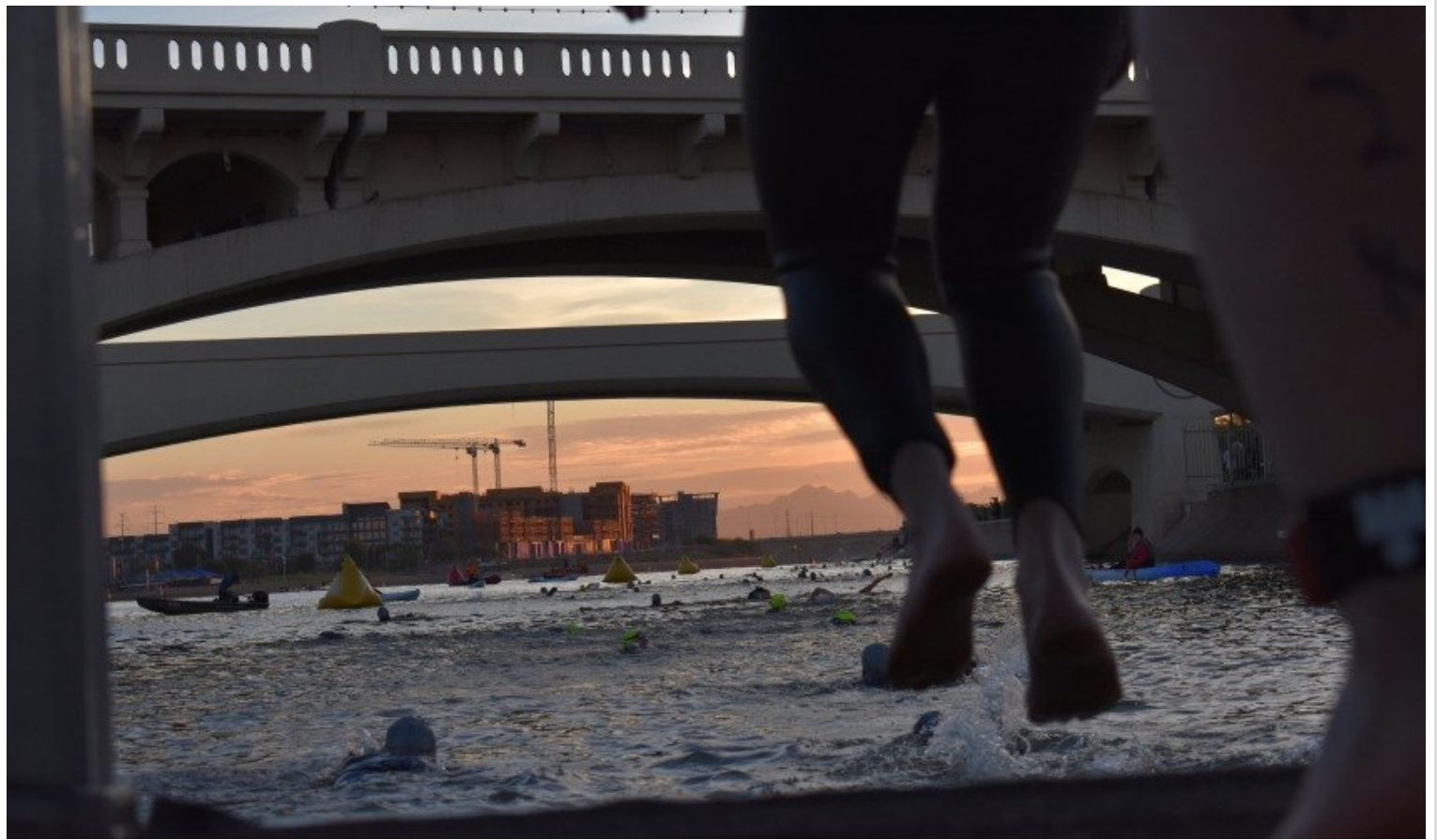


DRILLS TO PREPARE FOR OPEN WATER SWIMMING



By Joan Scrivanich

Many triathletes experience a fear of the open water. There are a number of things you can do to help prepare yourself and calm your nerves on race morning.

To prepare for the triathlon swim, you need to train to race in the turbulence of open water. In addition using open water swim technique, open water skills can be incorporated in the pool as drills during your swim session. Sighting and bilateral breathing are two necessary skills for open water swimming that

triathletes learn early on in their training. However, there are other drills that you can practice in the pool that will prepare you for a variety of conditions that you will experience on race day.

Here are four drills that I often use with my athletes to help prepare them for race day.

Water Polo Drill

As a triathlete, you need to sight in order to look for buoys and stay on course. If not done correctly, sighting can result in your hips and legs dropping, causing drag and resulting in slower race times. This is a great drill to help you perfect your sighting without losing your swimming form.

To perform this drill, swim freestyle with your head above water looking straight forward. Your turnover should be quick while maintaining your balance and kicking near the surface.

This is a challenging drill, so if you're a weak swimmer I would suggest doing this earlier in your set of drills or during your warm-up before you get too tired.

Swimming Without Goggles

The triathlon swim can seem like a contact sport at times. Getting bumped into or diving into water can cause goggles to be accidentally knocked off or filled with water. Even if you put your goggles on under your cap, they can still be knocked out of place (but thankfully not lost forever).

Include swimming without goggles anytime during your swim session. The familiarity of what you've already experienced in training will prepare you for that initial shock of having water hit your eyes if you lose your goggles so that you can continue your swim without losing much time or energy.

To avoid the irritation of chlorine and water in your eyes, keep your eyes closed while your face is in the water and open them when you breathe and sight.

Swimming With Your Eyes Closed

This drill is a great way of knowing how straight you really do swim without following the black line. Veering off to one side indicates an asymmetry in your stroke or kick, which is not uncommon. Swimming straight can save minutes in your race by not zigzagging and adding extra yardage to the course.

Include this drill anytime by swimming as you normally would but with your eyes closed. It's helpful to know how many strokes you take to swim one length so that you don't bump in the wall unexpectedly. I would also advise against doing this while sharing a lane (your lane buddy may get tired of getting bumped into).

Swimming With Others In The Same Lane and Drafting

Swimming in a lane by yourself is always nice, but it doesn't prepare you for the other triathletes racing to you. This drill is especially important for those of you who are not comfortable being in close proximity or being bumped into by the other athletes. While drafting is not legal on the bike, it is legal while swimming and it can shave off a lot of time on race day.

This drill can be done anytime in your swim session, but is especially useful when doing a faster set. Get a few of your swimming friends, squeeze into one lane, and go out fast at the same time. This simulates the start of a race and once you're all swimming, you can practice drafting off each other. To draft, either go behind or next to the hip of a swimmer who's slightly faster than you are.

We race better by practicing and by feeling a familiarity with our experiences. While it may not be practical to swim in open water all the time, we can at least simulate the experience and improve our technique in the pool. No one knows what the conditions will be on race day, so be prepared to adjust to the water conditions and environment by including these drills in your swim workouts.

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