

# The Wet Gazette

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## FREESTYLE: TOP FIVE TIPS



By Andrew Sheaff\*

**Practice is where every swimmer improves their skills and improves their fitness.** Improved skills and fitness should result in faster racing, but that's not always the case. To swim faster, you have to execute your races effectively, and this is a distinct skill that is often overlooked when preparing for competition. To help you improve this skill, I'm going to provide you with specific ideas to help you improve your racing.

As with all of these tips, I'm going to focus on the critical areas of race management, and then describe how each of those areas is relevant to each particular stroke. Today, we're going to explore some key ideas for how to effectively race freestyle events. While these ideas can be immediately implemented in your next meet, you have to PRACTICE these tips in order to be most effectively at executing these skills in competition. You want these strategies to be habits, and that's only going to happen with practice. Let's check them out.

**1. Plan your breathing.** Swimming freestyle without breathing feels really good. It feels so good that many swimmers forget to breathe until their first lap is almost complete! Outside of the 50 freestyle, this is a huge mistake. You want as much as you can get as early as you can get it. If you don't, you're setting yourself up for a lot of fatigue in the second half of the race, regardless of the distance. Whenever I am coaching a swimmer and they struggle over the second half of the race, one of the first places I look is whether they were breathing early in the race.

Once you're breathing early in the race, it's critical to establish a consistent breathing pattern. It's up to you to decide what that breathing pattern is, provided it's one that you're comfortable with and you've practiced. In most races, you probably want to breathe every 2 strokes, and in some cases, every 3 strokes. Even for the 100, you

want to get as much air as you can for as long as you can. Of course, in the 50, try to breathe as little as possible!

Why is a consistent pattern so important? Having a consistent breathing pattern helps you get into a rhythm and a groove, and that's a huge factor in success. If you're breathing at random times, you're going to constantly disrupt your rhythm. Even worse, you might not breathe until you need to. As we saw with breathing early, this is going to cause you fatigue early. Solve this problem by rehearsing your breathing pattern in practice. Lastly, having a consistent breathing pattern gives you something simple to focus on, and if you're prone to be a little anxious while racing, it can be just what you need to stay in control.

**2. Manage your legs.** Kicking hard and swimming fast feels great...until your legs give out and you still have two more laps to swim! The legs serve as a turbo-booster, and the key is to always use that turbo booster at exactly the right time so you can finish strong while getting everything you can out of the legs. While there is no universal approach to using your legs, the following guidelines can be a great starting point that will be effective for the vast majority of individuals. Of course, these are guidelines that are going to be effective for most swimmers, and you might need to modify the strategy based upon your circumstance. Give it a try and see how it works for you, and with further experimentation, adjust as necessary.

- 50/100 Freestyle- Have at it and use your legs to their full capacity!
- 200 Freestyle- Establish a strong kick, but keep it in control. Over the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the race, turn it up!
- 500/1000/1650 Freestyle- Use a steady kick until you feel ready to make a move. Then slowly turn up the legs until it's time to execute the finishing sprint to finish. At that time, unleash the legs!

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## Current and Upcoming Events

### Carol Chidester Memorial Swim Series

Meet #1: October 24, 2021; Ellicott City, MD

Meet #2: November 13, 2021; Easton, MD

Meet #3: December 12, 2021; Chestertown, MD

Meet #4: January 16, 2022; Annapolis, MD

Meet #6: March 21, 2022; Annapolis MD

### 8th Annual Solstice SCM Swim Meet

December 4, 2021; Boyds, MD

### 2021 Go The Distance

December 31, 2021

## General Information

LMSC for Virginia Website: [www.vaswim.org](http://www.vaswim.org)

USMS Website: [www.usms.org](http://www.usms.org)

#### Nearby LMSCs

North Carolina: [www.ncmasters.org](http://www.ncmasters.org)

Maryland: [www.teamunify.com](http://www.teamunify.com)

Potomac Valley: [www.PVMasters.org](http://www.PVMasters.org)

#### Nearby Zones

Colonies Zone: [www.ColoniesZone.org](http://www.ColoniesZone.org)

Dixie Zone: [www.DixieZone.org](http://www.DixieZone.org)

#### Online Meet Registrations:

[www.clubassistant.com](http://www.clubassistant.com)

## LMSC Officers

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Officials: Charlie Cockrell

Records & Top Ten: Chris Stevenson

Review: Heather Stevenson

Safety: Jim Miller

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**3. Know your gears.** When racing, you can 'change gears' by picking up your stroke rate, and slightly reducing your stroke length. The problem becomes when swimmers get too excited and swim in the wrong gear, especially at the start of a race. Usually, this is referred to 'spinning your wheels'. A great way to combat this tendency is to know what your stroke counts should be for certain portions of your races. While being off by 1 stroke isn't a big deal, being off by 3 is a clear indication that something is going wrong. Fortunately, having this awareness can allow you to make the necessary adjustments before it's too late.

If this approach seems a little too cerebral for your taste, it's critical to be able to feel when you're rushing your strokes, or staying too long. With the ability to feel what you're doing, you can make the critical adjustments required to make sure you're racing in an optimal gear. Regardless of the approach you take, you can learn to recognize the appropriate gears when swimming fast in practice. Pay attention to how you're swimming, and how effective it is, and use that information to guide how you should approach your races.

**4. Attack your turns.** You can look at turns in one of two ways- an opportunity to rest or an opportunity to win. While it may be a little bit more uncomfortable, I suggest you choose the latter. Many swimmers slow down into the turn. Instead speed UP. While the examining the details of great turns is a different topic, ALL of those details tend to be executed better when you approach the wall with speed. You're more likely to hit the turn fast, hit the wall well, push off strongly, and breakout cleanly when you're swimming fast. This all adds up to fast swimming. Many swimmers are giving up 1 second or more on each turn! By simply picking up your effort into the wall, most turning issues will disappear. Use that to your advantage, attack the turns, and gain an edge on the competition.

**5. Have a plan.** There are a lot of different ways to swim each race, and many of them can work. It's important to know what's going to work best for you. While I can't necessarily predict what your best strategy will be, I'll provide you with some options. Regardless, I know that the plan that won't work is the 'see what happens' plan. Unfortunately, this a plan that a lot of swimmers use, even really fast swimmers.

Swim your race rather than someone else's. Know what race strategy is going to be most effective for you, and stick with it. Not sure how to approach your race? Here are some strategies to play with, as well as the distances that these strategies tend to work well with. Remember, to experiment in practice, and once you find a strategy that's comfortable, make it a habit. Regardless of your plan, remember to integrate the other tips into your race strategy.

- All out- This strategy is as exactly as it sounds, you go as fast as you can, for as long as you can. This strategy is perfect for the 50 freestyle, as well as for certain brave souls in the 100.
- Control, build, blast- For this strategy, the first quarter of the race is swum fast and controlled, the second quarter is swum build to maximal effort, and the second half is swum all out. This strategy is best suited for the 100 and 200 freestyle.

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## In Memoriam: Katie Grauman Grier (1978-2021)

*— This article was originally published for an intended audience of William & Mary swimming alumni. Since masters swimming was such a big part of Katie's life, we wanted to share it with the Virginia Masters Swimming community.*

**Katie Grauman Grier**, devoted mother, daughter, sister and aunt, fiercely loyal friend, and legendary William & Mary swimmer (Class of 2000), died of complications from breast cancer on August 20 at her home in Winchester, VA. She was 43 years old. In her final hours, just as in the many preceding months, Katie was comforted and cared for by her adoring father, Gary, and her beloved children, Ian and Sophia. She is also survived by a loving extended family, including her brother, Jeremy, and a vast constellation of friends and teammates.



For the last several months, Katie faced an incurable and ever-worsening cancer with clear eyes and unfathomable power and strength. Her bravery, honesty and good humor were a gift to all who were struggling to help and support her. Katie emphasized to friends and family that she drew sustenance from their steadfast support and took consolation and repose from her Christian faith.

Katie Lynn Grauman was born in Phoenix, Arizona on July 13, 1978 to Gary and Terry Grauman. Katie was raised primarily in Turlock, California, where she had a tight-knit group of friends, often seeking refuge from the San Joaquin Valley heat in her backyard pool. Katie became a nationally recognized youth water polo player, but shifted her focus to swimming after the family moved to Virginia. She thrived academically and captained the Harrisonburg High School swim team from 1994 to 1996. Katie studied Art and Art History at William & Mary and built a career in commercial furniture and design, serving for the past several years as a project manager with Washington Workplace LLC in Arlington, VA. Katie's mother, Terry, preceded her in death in 2008 but remained a constant presence and inspiration in her life.

Katie was recruited to W&M by Coach Ned Skinner as part of a transformative Freshman class, and led a group that restored the Tribe's competitiveness following the College's attempt to eliminate the program in the early 1990s. Katie was a natural leader, a consummate teammate, and a pure, unblinking, racer. She was the anchor leg on nearly every relay she swam, including the CAA Champion 200 Medley Relay teams in 1997 and 1998. Katie held individual school records in the 50, 100 and 200 Freestyle and was the lynchpin of a group that re-wrote the W&M relay records. She is currently ranked eighth in W&M Women's Swimming history for both total career victories (52) and total career points (1,127.25) – one of the only swimmers from her era still in the Top 16 in those categories.

In 2014, Katie joined a few of her former teammates to create Club Tribe Masters Swimming, a U.S. Masters team comprised largely of W&M alumni. Katie was an indispensable leader on deck and behind the scenes, working every day to build, grow, and enhance the team. She was Club Tribe's center of gravity.

Although she had been out of the pool for 15 years, Katie trained relentlessly and took her performance to astonishing heights. Simply put, she became the fastest woman in her age group in the United States. She swam lifetime best times in the 50 Yard Freestyle at age 39 (23.82) and in the 100 Yard Freestyle at age 40 (51.49), surpassing her college performances. In 2019, Katie was named the U.S. Masters Swimming Pool All-Star for women age 40-44 – a distinction held by the one swimmer in each age group who achieves the most national #1 rankings in a calendar year. Katie was an individual USMS All-American five times and a USMS relay All-American six times, amassing 17 national #1 rankings in individual events and 20 national #1 rankings on

### Freestyle (cont'd from page 2)

- Negative split- When negative splitting, the goal is to swim the second half of the race faster than the first half of the race. At about the halfway point, you really make a move and then bring it home fast. This can work well for the middle distance (400-m/500-yd) and distance events (800-m/1000-yd/1500-m/1650-yd) races.
- Building- You'll aim to build each segment of the race, trying to get progressively faster. This is similar to negative splitting, but broken down to smaller pieces. This works great for a short-course or long-course mile, where the goal is to swim each third of the race at a faster speed, building each third.



### Conclusion

While training sets the stage for fast racing as it develops your abilities, you actually have to execute your races to display those abilities. Too often swimmers simply attack their races with great enthusiasm, and little intention. When racing freestyle events, you can avoid this mistake by planning your breathing, managing your legs, controlling your tempo, attacking your turns, and executing a race strategy. If you can accomplish these objectives, you'll be well on your way to accomplishing your goals.

*\*Andrew Sheaff is currently an assistant swimming coach at the University of Virginia, the 2021 NCAA Champions. He helps swimmers and triathletes find comfort, ease, and speed in the water by providing the foundational skill development tools that enable them to achieve their aquatic goals. If you have any questions about skill development or improving your performance, he can be reached at through his website [www.andrewsheaffcoaching.com](http://www.andrewsheaffcoaching.com) or via e-mail at [andrew@andrewsheaffcoaching.com](mailto:andrew@andrewsheaffcoaching.com)*

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### Katie (cont'd from page 3)

relays. She currently holds seven USMS national relay records, 17 individual state records, and 24 relay state records.

As a competitor, Katie held herself to impossibly high standards. Her work ethic and pain tolerance were unmatched. Through it all, she remained humble to a fault and was never self-congratulatory. She was far more excited to see a teammate perform well, or to help a relay get to the wall first, than she ever was with her own swims. As a leader, she was gracious, encouraging, welcoming, and thoughtful. She made everyone around her better, and she is truly irreplaceable. As one dear friend and longtime teammate of Katie's put it: "She was a badass, and she was our badass."

Both on deck and outside of the pool, Katie was hilarious, sarcastic, considerate, self-sacrificing, and generous. If a group gift needed to be purchased, she led the charge. If someone needed encouragement, she was on the phone. Even under the most difficult circumstances one could imagine – in the final year of her life – she never sought sympathy or took a moment to feel sorry for herself. She could give brutally honest feedback without being offensive. She was the first to give praise, and she was an utterly loyal friend. Most importantly to Katie, she loved her children more than anything in the world.

Katie's final contribution to W&M Swimming was to fight for the survival of the program in the fall and spring of 2020-21. Although she worked mainly behind the scenes, Katie was part of a crucial effort on September 23, 2020 to engage the Board of Visitors at a public listening session and persuade them to reconsider the program cuts. That evening, suffering from what she would soon learn were symptoms of advanced metastatic breast cancer, Katie stood before the BOV and made a memorably forceful and compelling statement. The speech was typical Katie -- cutting to the chase, taking subtext and making it text, and reinforcing the themes pressed so brilliantly by the many Save Tribe Swimming speakers at that session. Katie will be remembered in many ways by many people, but this may be the best way for W&M Swimming to remember her -- anchoring a relay of swimmers, parents, alumni and friends, and protecting the team that she loved.

— by Kyle Ahlgren (W&M '97) and Rich Williams (W&M '98)