

EDUCATION SECTION – OLYMPIC SWIMMER TRAINING SCHEDULE

The long term athlete development plan is an excellent guide for swimmers to follow from junior to senior ages. However, what does an Olympic champion actually do within their training program to be that good?

We know that to be a great swimmer a person must be uniquely talented; technically excellent, physically impressive and mentally tough. Unfortunately, we do not all have these qualities but even if we are blessed enough to be a person who possesses such attributes they still have to undergo a rigorous training regime to maximise their potential.

This week’s Education Section is the training program of an Olympic Champion. Before Michael Phelps this is the swimmer I pretended to be in training more than anyone else! This is the training program of **TOM DOLAN**.

Tom Dolan was coached by the great Jon Urbanchek of the University of Michigan Swim Team. He was the gold medal winner in the 400 IM at the 1996 and 2000 Olympic Games. His time of 4.11.7 was a world record in the 2000 Olympic Games. The program details that follow are from the days prior to his achievements in the 1996 Olympic Games.

- Tom’s training volume varied between 70,000 and 80,000m per week.
- He trained 10 times per week.
- Tom trained twice on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday
- He trained once on Wednesday afternoon and once Saturday morning.
- He took Sunday off.

The table below details a typical training week for Tom Dolan.

DAY	AM	PM
Monday	Low-mod intensity aerobic set, pulling, kicking drills 7000	Threshold short rest, hard pace set 10000
Tuesday	Low to moderate aerobic set, Breaststroke emphasis, kicking with fins, sprint assisted and resisted training 7000	Active rest – recovery Breaststroke emphasised 9000
Wednesday	OFF	VO2 max set (hard as you can go set off short to medium rest) 8000
Thursday	Low to moderate aerobic set, Drills, fin kicking, hypoxic training 7000	Threshold short rest, hard pace set 9000
Friday	Low to moderate aerobic set, backstroke emphasised, Breaststroke kicking, sprint assisted and resisted training 7000	Active rest, backstroke emphasised 8000
Saturday	VO2 max or lactate tolerance training (hard sprint training) 8000	OFF

- Week day morning sessions were generally devoted to basic endurance training in the form of swimming, kicking and pulling
- Monday morning emphasised frontcrawl kicking and pulling drills
- Tuesday and Friday morning sessions focused on Backstroke and Breaststroke swimming
- On these mornings he done a lot of breaststroke kicking with no board and sprinting on all strokes
- On Thursday morning he done more basic endurance training on swimming, kicking and pulling. He also performed a hard breath holding set
- On Saturday morning Tom performed a hard sprint set i.e. 6x100 @ 8mins

- On Monday and Thursday afternoons Tom swam long (1hr) threshold (hard as possible effort off short rest) sets. He swam these sets on free or medley.
- On Monday he worked off 10-15 seconds rest. On Thursday he worked off 20-30 seconds rest and swam at faster paces.
- On Tuesday and Friday afternoon Tom swam set of active rest which was composed of long steady swims with fast short repeats in between.
- Wednesday night he performed a hard as you can go set off medium rest i.e. 30x100 @ 1.45. He performed all strokes on this set.

My View on this Program

I probably should not comment on what I agree and do not agree with on this program because Tom Dolan was the best IM swimmer in the world for nearly 8 years..... but I will anyway!

What I agree with

1. Tom's volume is big – so is Michael Phelps – so is nearly all top sprint and middle distance swimmers. The amount of swimming a top swimmer does needs to be large
2. I think that a big emphasis on single strokes is good – Tom swam a lot of backstroke and breaststroke sets which I think is important for complete development on a single stroke
3. I think the short rest work is important for a swimmer who specializes in 400m distances – it is a very aerobic event and a top swimmer must be able to consistently perform at high intensities with good technique under short rest conditions
4. I think Sunday off is a good thing – if you run a program where you have complete control over pool time and swimming is the most important sport in the University!

What I disagree with

1. Bob Bowman (Michael Phelps coach) gets him to sprint every session in some form – I believe this is very important for top older swimmers. Hitting top speeds and race stroke rates is important especially during heavy volume periods. Tom Dolan did not adopt this philosophy.
2. I would not perform lots of kicking and pulling on basic endurance paces. It is my belief that pulling / kicking needs to be performed mostly as hard as possible. Isolated body parts training should focus on improving strength – I do not see how low to moderate training on arms only or legs only achieves this

Apart from these 2 things I think his program is excellent and an eye opener for swimmers that stick around 30000 to 40000m on their hardest training weeks. That's why I am so pleased The Elite Performance Squad is now touching volumes of 45-55km per week during hard training phases. I have very positive thoughts on how this will affect performance at upcoming competitions!