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A book to add to your arsenal

Swimming World and Junior Swimmer, Jun 2000 by Block, George

The Swim to Win Playbook by Dr. Keith Bell

Dr. Keith Bell's latest contribution to the swimming coach's arsenal of mental training tools, "The Swim to Win Playbook," may be the most practical and useful yet. It can be used both by coaches with their teams and by individual athletes who want to spend some extra time developing this aspect of their personal performance potential.

The playbook is broken into 18 sections (plus an introduction that Dr. Bell refers to as the "Warmup") that fit nicely into a typical season. The issues Dr. Bell deals with in each section build logically. They reflect the typical issues dealt with by every coach, swimmer and team as most seasons progress.

Inside of each section/chapter/ week, there are exercises for practically every day of the week. It was these exercises that I found most useful.

Dr. Bell has remained conceptually consistent from "Winning Isn't Normal" to "Championship Thinking," with successive volumes adding a little more "meat" to the conceptual framework he has given us. Like many coaches, I have tried to pass along this information to my swimmers through handouts, discussions...you name it.

Unfortunately, we all have learned that the worst way to communicate with adolescents is by lecturing them. I tried to develop "exercises" to let them experience some of these concepts, but quickly found myself wandering outside the realm of my expertise. This is what "Playbook" really brings to the table.

Each sub-section is a self-contained exercise, or set of exercises, designed to let athletes have that "Oh, yeah!" experience around a personal performance topic. Since each exercise is a pencil-and-paper introspection, athletes learn not just the concept, but how that concept relates to them.

Most recently, I have found "preseason" to be an excellent time to use the "Playbook" because the time is easily available and the exercises and experiences clarify the values and expectations for the coming season. Using it before the season actually starts allows the

coach to lay a nice psychological "foundation" for the team's training that season.

The only down side to early use was that experiences, problems and emotions were not being explored as they occurred in each season, but were being remembered from previous seasons. Situations were not as "fresh," but when they inevitably did occur later in the season, the athletes' learning curves were greatly accelerated.

"The Swim to Win Playbook" should be added to every coach's arsenal. At the very least, after spending a season doing Dr. Bell's exercises, I have a much better idea how to design my own. -By George Block

To order "The Swim to Win Playbook," call 1-800-352-7946, ext 1, or visit Swimming World's web site at <http://www.swiminfo.com>. Use order #1354.

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