

## **TEACHING SKILLS**

### **FOR THE SURF LIFESAVING ATHLETE**

**Submitted to  
Surf lifesaving coaches  
November 2005**

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This paper is aimed at sharing & providing some ideas to surf lifesaving coaches around Australia about what are the appropriate skills to teach/coach our athletes. For the purpose of this paper we are going to examine the skills that are appropriate for kids ranging from 8 years of age to elite open competitors.

Various skills will be presented using examples gathered from a group of highly credentialed coaches selected by Surf Lifesaving Australia to conduct their Level 3 Coaching Accreditation in Sydney, October 2005. The following skills outlined will be a collaboration of some of the sports leading young & old surf coaches. These skills are used by these coaches & are subsequently passed on to some of the sports leading athlete's world wide.

Perspectives will be offered from a personnel coaching point of view as well as from their personnel experience gained over many years of coaching. Some of these coaches are currently coaching &/or assisting current Australian & World Champions.

The desired result of this paper is to bring the ideas from 15 of Australia's leading surf lifesaving coaches & share their ideas about how best to develop their desired skills of our surf lifesaving athletes whether they are young or old, beginners or World Champions. I will provide a consensus of the results that best reflect the most efficient use the participants, their strengths, time, energy & any other factors that may be required to assist with these developments.

### **GOALS**

The success of the coach starts early on with a personnel goal or vision of the commitment to the athlete, the training program & the development of the athlete, including their skill development. Like an athlete the goal must be realistic, manageable & achievable. Also like the athlete your goal should be continually assessed & reassessed on a regular basis. The goal as former Australian Beach Sprint Champion, Darren Peters stated "must come 'alive' & carried along by the egos of willing athletes".

As a coach you set your goal, this goal describes what you are trying to achieve, what you are attempting to do. It is like a journey, a vision, your goal

has a start but never should stop, you should be continually assessing & reassessing.

We all know that to be successful, goals are important, but how many coaches actually set their own goals. As coaches we all assist our athletes with their goal setting but neglect to focus on what we as coaches are trying to achieve. As coaches what are we trying to achieve; produce champions, teach skills, provide a healthy fun environment, assist with the development of young kids. What is your goal?

The goal you set should reflect the strength & weaknesses of not only your athletes but yourself. This will provide you with an easier avenue for you to start developing the necessary strategies which will embrace the athlete's needs & goals.

## **COACHING**

Coaching is a simple game. Well, it should be. The idea of a coach is to assist with the standard & development of athletic performances through a more personalised approach. The programs the coach puts together should reflect the ages of the athletes as well as the ability &/or levels of the athletes. Long gone is the notion that large groups of athletes training under the same program is either beneficial or is assisting their development to improve either as an athlete or their ongoing skill level. As much as coaching is about training the athlete, a lot has got to be said for the art of good communication.

Communication has many different forms in the coaching environment. As surf coaches it is common to establish effective communication with your athletes, but how about their swim coaches, their families, mums/dads, wives/husbands, you see the list is long. This is often highlighted with athletes being given a hard swim session in the morning by the swim coaches then turning up in the afternoon for the surf session to receive the same when they should be still trying to recover from the morning session. Dialogue between the coaches goes a long way to assist with the development of athletes irrespective of their age or ability. It will also enable the groups to work together & ensure they work towards their club coaching plan.

As a coach it is strongly recommended that you continue to develop your own personnel skills or as a club you should be encouraging your club coaches to attend accredited coaching courses that are applicable to their level or the level of the athletes at your club. As part of the clubs commitment to assist its members with their development all costs associated with the courses should be paid for by the club.

## **SUMMARY**

The purpose of this paper was to highlight the needs or lack of, for surf lifesaving athletes in terms of their skill development irrespective of their age or the athletic ability/level.

As discussed it is vitally important for you the coach to set & constantly re-evaluate your goals in regards to your coaching. Your goal must be alive in the minds of your athletes. Be innovative, be realistic.

Your vision will assist the development of your athletes. Communicate openly & regularly with all involved in the coaching program of your club & your club athletes.

Devise coaching programs that best suit the needs of the members of your club. Remember no one program is suited to everyone, athletes are all individuals.

Following is an outline of skills that may be used to assist with the required development of athletes at your club. This information has been gathered by some of Australia's leading surf lifesaving coaches. These coaches have gathered & used these skills to develop current Australian & World Champions among their stable of athletes.

I hope that this information has been of some value & will hopefully assist you with the development of the surf lifesaving stars of the future.

The following list of skills are what the group as individuals believe should be taught to surf lifesaving athletes. I have compiled a thorough list of all skills/activities across all surf lifesaving disciplines & ages. I hope that this can be of some benefit to you & in turn a benefit to the athletes & our kids.

## SURF SWIMMING

SKILLS	SESSIONS/WK
<b>U/8</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning rules</li> <li>• General safety</li> <li>• Gain confidence in the pool before entering the surf</li> <li>• Wading skills</li> <li>• Understanding basic ocean conditions eg. rips, currents, inshore holes, wave types, sandbanks</li> <li>• Dolphin diving under waves</li> </ul>	<p>General consensus is for</p> <p>1-2 sessions/wk</p>
<b>U/9</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A continuance of all the skills learnt in u/8</li> <li>• Further developing from u/8 understanding the ocean &amp; winds</li> <li>• Further develop wading, dolphin diving skills</li> <li>• Introduce body surfing skills</li> <li>• Encourage enjoyment</li> </ul>	<p>General consensus is for</p> <p>2-3 sessions/wk</p>
<b>U/10</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Once again it should be a continuance of the skills learnt in the 2 previous ages</li> <li>• Further develop body surfing, dolphin diving, wading</li> <li>• Introduce technique for catching broken waves while swimming</li> <li>• Starts</li> <li>• Enjoyment</li> </ul>	<p>General consensus</p> <p>2-3 sessions/wk</p>
<b>U/11</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue skills from previous years &amp; build on the progress of each child</li> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• Breathing techniques for going through larger surf</li> <li>• Further development of body surfing skills</li> <li>• Introduce more in's &amp; out's</li> <li>• Teaching how to use the ocean &amp; the conditions for the benefit of the athlete</li> </ul>	<p>General consensus</p> <p>2-4 sessions/wk</p>
<b>U/12</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further progression of the skills already learnt</li> <li>• Continue with developing body surfing skills – more developing for tech in catching broken waves</li> <li>• Understanding head, feet &amp; body positions in regards to wave catching &amp; general ocean swimming</li> <li>• Introduction of racing techniques/tactics</li> <li>• Understanding swimming in 'packs' or groups</li> <li>• Continue to develop understanding of the ocean</li> </ul>	<p>General consensus</p> <p>2-4 sessions/wk</p>
<b>U/13</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start to refine specific skills already learnt in earlier age groups. Start being more selective, assist with weaknesses</li> <li>• Enhance the qualities already learnt</li> <li>• Teach how to race to the strengths of the athletes</li> <li>• How to maintain direction when swimming in the ocean</li> </ul>	<p>General consensus</p> <p>3-5 sessions/wk</p>
<b>U/15</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic skills should have been learnt through the young ages, if not progress skills during sessions – continue to enhance these skills</li> <li>• The majority of sessions for this age as well as for the older ages will now be conducted in the pool</li> </ul>	<p>General consensus</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surf sessions should always involve continued ongoing development of all surf skills</li> <li>• Emphasis race simulation more</li> <li>• Starts, wading, dolphin diving, finishing all now play more of a role</li> </ul>	4-5 sessions/wk
<b>U/17</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to work on all the basic skills eg. understanding the ocean, waves, tides, winds, rips, currents, sandbanks, inshore holes, body surfing, wading, dolphin diving</li> <li>• More emphasis is placed on race simulation</li> <li>• Increase the confidence of the athlete</li> <li>• Increase the quality of starts/finishes</li> </ul>	General consensus  4-6 sessions/wk
<b>U/19</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As above the development of the surf skills is always ongoing</li> <li>• Race simulation, race tactics</li> <li>• A large % is spent in the pool in the older ages</li> </ul>	General consensus 5 sessions/wk
<b>OPEN</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A refinement of all the above skills</li> <li>• Race simulation, race tactics</li> <li>• Increasing confidence</li> <li>• Improve weaknesses</li> <li>• Improve strength</li> <li>• Decrease chances of injury e.g. stretching</li> </ul>	General consensus  5-6 sessions/wk

## BOARD PADDLING

SKILL	SESSIONS/WK
<b>U/8 – U/13</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was a general consensus amongst the majority of the level 3 coaches that board paddling is an ongoing activity that should be taught through all ages in the nipper ranks. It is important to teach the skills necessary as early as possible so you can assist with &amp; build on these skills as they are required to be. These skills include but are not limited to –</li> <li>• All relevant basic surf skills</li> <li>• Gaining confidence</li> <li>• Getting on &amp; off the board</li> <li>• Body position on the board</li> <li>• Board position in the water</li> <li>• Tech of paddling</li> <li>• The stroke – hand entry/exit</li> <li>• Starts/finishes</li> <li>• Understanding the ocean, rips, currents, tides, waves, sandbanks, inshore holes</li> <li>• Bunny hopping</li> <li>• Rolling – hand position, body position, arm positions. How fast should you get back onto your board</li> <li>• Popping waves – they need to understand the ocean first. Where do you sit, when do you sit up, lie down. How fast should you paddle into the wave?</li> <li>• Wave catching – when do you move back, should you move back, how far do you move back, when do you move forward</li> <li>• Catching broken waves</li> <li>• Buoy turns</li> <li>• Emphasise enjoyment, encourage fun activities</li> <li>• You can alternate between the beach &amp; flat water venues</li> </ul>	General consensus  2 sessions/wk with the younger ages advancing to 3 for the older ages

SKILL	SESSIONS/WK
<p><b>U/14 – OPEN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching skills on the Malibu now starts from the age of U/14</li> <li>• While this age is a little different as they have little or no experience on the mal they still all require the same skill level that will assist them in their racing</li> <li>• Irrespective of the ability/level of the athlete 1 thing stands out in our sport – SKILLS</li> <li>• Once again there appears to be a fairly consensual attitude to developing the skill level of our athletes. These skills are listed below.</li> <li>• Malibu board technique</li> <li>• Body position, board positioning, kneeling/lying position, hand entry, when &amp; where to exit the water in regards to stroke, hand position on entry, elbow position on entry</li> <li>• Popping waves, where to sit, when to pop, when not to, when do you go back to your stomach, what speed should you approach the wave, what type of wave do you pop</li> <li>• Rolling – hand position, body position, board position, speed into the wave, how do you get back on the board, when do you get back on the board</li> <li>• Kneeling over whitewash – kneeling position, body position</li> <li>• Entering/exiting the water</li> <li>• Starts – dragging opposed to hip starts, how do you hold your board, do you have a hand hold for the start</li> <li>• Catching waves – green &amp; broken, spilling/dumping. Difference between kneeling and lying.</li> <li>• Chasing ocean runners/swells</li> <li>• Buoy turns – kneeling or lying</li> <li>• Bunny hopping, wading with board holding 1 handle &amp; dragging board</li> <li>• These skills should be ongoing &amp; part of whatever session you are conducting</li> <li>• Alternate venues</li> </ul>	<p>General consensus</p> <p>3-4 sessions/wk</p>

## SKI PADDLING

SKILLS	SESSIONS/WK
<p><b>JUNIORS- U/15</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social/fun paddle- no structure</li> <li>• Emphasise fun/enjoyment</li> <li>• Allow to learn balance</li> <li>• Basic, basic technique – how to hold paddle</li> <li>• Ensure the equipment is suitable for the child</li> <li>• Use as a stepping stone for the future</li> </ul>	<p>General consensus</p> <p>1-2 sessions/wk</p>
<p><b>U17 – OPEN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue with the basic development that was in place with your junior members</li> <li>• Balance drills – catching waves both on singles &amp; doubles</li> <li>• Technique early on is very important</li> <li>• Catch, pull, exit – how far do you reach, how do you pull through, what are the correct positions for your hands, when do I exit at the finish of my stroke, how high should my hands be</li> <li>• Accelerate through your stroke</li> <li>• Rotate the trunk, use larger muscle groups not just arms. Keep lower body still.</li> </ul>	<p>General consensus</p> <p>2-3 sessions/wk for the ironman</p> <p>4-7 sessions/wk for the ski paddler</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use your legs as a counter lever to gain more power</li> <li>• Keep your head still</li> <li>• Holding your paddle in the correct location</li> <li>• Ensure that the equipment is suitable – right sized paddle, ski leg length</li> <li>• Jump starts – 1 or 2 legged</li> <li>• Negotiating the break</li> <li>• Catching waves – steering</li> <li>• Chasing runners/ocean swells</li> <li>• Racing amongst a pack/group of paddlers</li> <li>• Riding the ski in sideways</li> <li>• Refine race tactics</li> </ul>	
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## RUNNING

SKILL	SESSIONS/WK
<p><b>U/8 – U/13</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As in many sports there should be a continuance of the skills learnt from year to year, beach events in surf lifesaving appears to be no different. Amongst the level 3 the general idea of the skills required for our beachies is as follows.</li> <li>• Early ages ensure there are fun activities, games, relays</li> <li>• Teach skills that encourage &amp; promote body posture, co-ordination, body awareness &amp; natural body strength. This includes</li> <li>• Running &amp; weaving</li> <li>• Agility runs</li> <li>• Backwards running</li> <li>• Slalom running</li> <li>• Basic shuttle runs</li> <li>• Team games that involve running</li> <li>• Look to improve balance, timing, co-ordination &amp; flexibility</li> <li>• Running with high knees, correct arm action</li> <li>• Skills such as hopping, skipping, bounding</li> <li>• Starts – standing, crouch. Weight forward, opposite arm, opposite leg, no backward movement when gun goes</li> <li>• Other skills – butt kickers for quick leg recovery, foot strike under hips when running tall</li> <li>• Introduce tempo runs promoting correct technique</li> <li>• Further develop block starts –come out low, short fast steps, high arms swing &amp; full leg extension as coming out of blocks</li> </ul>	<p>General consensus</p> <p>1-2 sessions/wk</p>
<p><b>U/15 – OPEN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills for these ages are a continuance of what they have learnt in previous years. They are now able to build on these skills &amp; adapt to a higher workload.</li> <li>• Stride length &amp; stride frequency</li> <li>• Hill running</li> <li>• Hurdle drills for hip mobility</li> <li>• Bounding/speed bounding</li> <li>• Ply metrics</li> <li>• Sand dune running</li> <li>• Sled tows</li> <li>• A-skips, B-skips</li> <li>• Correct form at later stages of the race</li> <li>• Assisted tows</li> <li>• Running down hills to develop maximum speed</li> <li>• Starts – tech, power, speed</li> </ul>	<p>General consensus</p> <p>2-3 sessions/wk</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Body/head position at start, after start, during race, towards the end of the race</li> <li>• All skills should be a high level. Aim is to maintain skills &amp; technique &amp; work on conditioning the body.</li> <li>• Reaction timing</li> <li>• Gym work for strength</li> </ul>	
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## FLAGS

SKILL	SESSIONS/WK
<b>U/8 – OPEN</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Correct starting position</li> <li>• Pushing back towards the flag, leave front foot on the line</li> <li>• Diving for the flag</li> <li>• Rotation in the turn</li> <li>• Keeping low – body position</li> <li>• Hand position &amp; effects of push &amp; rotation</li> <li>• Driving out low, short fast steps</li> <li>• Develop control &amp; speed of turn</li> <li>• Body positioning &amp; jostling for flags</li> </ul>	General consensus  2 sessions/wk

## CONCLUSION

This report was compiled for the benefit of surf lifesaving coaches around Australia. The idea of putting together a report specifically outlining what are the appropriate skills to teach is to ensure that athletes of all ages are receiving the basic skill level that will assist them in their chosen sport of surf lifesaving. It is also important to note that the skills outlined range in complexity given the athletes age, ability & experience in the sport. These skills must be built on from year to year or age group to age group. Our sport unlike so many others **must** have a huge focus on the level of skill that is required. I'm not trying to say that other sports don't require skills, I'm saying very few sports race the elements like surf lifesaving.

As a coach it is important to keep up to date with the progression of the sport & the skill level within the sport. These skills highlighted above are a compilation of the skills that are taught by the applicants of the level 3 coaching course 2005. This list is by no means the only skills that are or should be taught, the list is enlist.

Hopefully this report can give an insight into the minds of some of Australia's leading surf lifesaving coaches.

I would also like to point out that the list of skills regarding the beach events appears not as comprehensive as the skills outlined for the water events. This was due to the number of participants at the course were greater for the water events. At no time did the author try to show any favouritism to any particular discipline. The compilation of all the skills listed is a gathering of the participant's ideas.