



How to have more energy at the end of the race (featuring Ash Delany)

Podcast 1

The Effortless Swimming Podcast



Hello and welcome to the very first Effortless Swimming podcast. My name is Brenton Ford. I am a National swimmer and coach from Melbourne Australia. This is the podcast where we talk to the top swimmers, coaches and experts from around the world and they share useful tips and information that will improve your technique, speed and endurance in the pool. If you are a swimmer, tri-athlete or a coach then this is for you. If you would like to receive transcriptions, bonus video's or updates of when the latest episodes are out of this podcast then you can go to swimmingpodcast.com or you can visit us at effortlessswimming.com.

In this first episode we are lucky enough to be talking with Ash Delaney who is an Olympic medallist and Commonwealth Games medallist. Ash won a silver medal as a heat swimmer in the 4 x 100m medley relay and was fifth in 100m backstroke in the Beijing Olympics. Ash also won gold in the 4 x 100m medley relay and three bronze medals in each of the three backstroke events in the Delhi Commonwealth Games. Ash has been at the top levels of the sport, competed there and is still at that level. We talked to Ash about different things about his technique, training and in particular his diet and some changes that he made and what those changes did for his swimming.



So let's cut straight to it; this is Ashley Delaney who is an Olympic medallist and Commonwealth Games medallist from Australia.

I swam when I was younger mostly because my older sister Lorae was swimming and this was in Gladstone, that's where I learnt to swim and she sort of got into the squad a little bit and they used to have these races on a Wednesday night and I was still learning to swim and they would have the learn to swim kids do a couple of races and they put me in; I must have been seven or six or something, I can't remember how old I was; and they put me in the 15m race and they had a rope across the pool and I sort of dove in and raced to that rope and ended up beating the other kids by a fair bit. Then they thought ok we will put you in the 25m race and so I got into that and ended up winning that by a lot



as well and they were getting really excited; "oh yeah, we will put you in the 50m race now" and I couldn't swim 50m without stopping, because we used to go to the pool just on the weekend or whatever and I just absolutely broke down and started bawling saying that I didn't want to do it, so they did end up putting me in the race and I guess that is probably why I probably swim more sprint events now is because I don't really like doing the long distance.

You have got to be a bit crazy to do the longer stuff I reckon; the sprints are so much more fun aren't they.

A few people I have heard say this quote; "People who can't sprint swim long distance" I think if you could swim you would do it because there is less training and it is so much better.

Yeah it's so true, and when you have to do 200m or more it is pretty tough... I mean it is a tough slog in training no matter what distance you do. I have started doing 50's and 100's now and it is a lot more enjoyable.

Makes swimming enjoyable.

When did you realise you could go somewhere with your swimming?

Yeah that's hard. I have sort of always had, like as kid to want to make the Olympics or get to that sort of level beyond the Australian team. You have these goals and especially when I was around 15-16 years old and I had these goals and got to 17-18 I started looking at the times that I did and I looked at what the top guys were doing and kind of saw it as being just so far away and I wasn't really sure if I could actually get there. You are looking at 3 or 4 seconds over 100m and at that age I just couldn't see where it was coming from and then you just sort of keep at it and I did and you try to learn new things and learn from whomever you can really, coaches other swimmers and then it sort of got a little bit closer like I made a couple of improvements and then you can really see that you have that opportunity to get to your goals and I guess it was only really around 19 maybe 20 I started to realise that I had a good chance of making it and the rest is sort of history. I got on that Olympic team at 21 and that was really a dream come true.

Yes, I mean a lot of people just see the top swimmers and they think that it is kind of luck or chance that they have got there but



they don't see the thousands of hours in the pool or training and the chipping away, like no one is there from the very start they have all got to work towards it and keep chipping away at their times and learning new things, meeting new people and improving their technique as they go. It is a long process and no one gets there by chance.

It is definitely a lot of hard work and people sort of see so and so have just swum at the state competition and six months later or the next meet they come out and go 2-3 seconds quicker but they don't see the work they have done or the changes they have made to sort of get there. They think it has come really easy for them or they have just grown and that's all that's happened sort of thing. But everyone has to work hard no matter how talented you are you still have to work pretty hard. There is so much work that you need to do and so many little hidden things that people do to get there.

I mean what is your training schedule like now? How many sessions you doing a week what kind of work are you doing?

We do ten sessions a week three gym in there and I would probably say we do anywhere from 35-50km a week which isn't a whole lot but I would sort of see depending on who you are; some people go 50-70km a week and then other may go less like 25-40km sort of thing so it just depends on the individual. I think I am in a pretty good spot at the moment and Rohan and myself are working well and I have been doing some pretty good times in training and stuff so I think we have got pretty good balance of working quite hard but then being skilful at the same time. I think if you get too tired you can lose a bit of sharpness and I think we have found a pretty good spot for me at the moment. Still been working hard and still get tired at the end of the week so you know you are doing a pretty decent job if that is happening but then swimming good times, so I think we have found a pretty good balance.

Yeah that's good and I mean back in the old days it used to just be about the kilometres, get as much work as you can done, and just absolutely flog yourself every session but things have really smartened up now where it is about skills, technique and doing the right kind of training. Like for sprinter its threshold work and sprints and that sort of thing and it is up to the individual and you and your coach need to talk about it and see what works best for you. As you said not everyone is the same.



Yeah I hate these almost make up kilometres, say ten 200's on 3 minutes and you just sort of swim away, unless there is a real specific sort of thing that you are working on then I kind of see it as being a bit of a waste your energy and time. I think you have to be smart with what you do.

Absolutely, you have got to understand the different energy systems and different kinds of things you should be working on. It took me a while to figure out why we were doing some kinds of training with the aerobic work and you need to get at least fifteen minutes of aerobic work done where your heart rate is in that aerobic zone for it to actually make a difference. So if you're doing eight minutes of aerobic swimming you don't get that benefit so you and your coach need to be switched onto that. Being at the level you are, your coach knows all that sort of thing and it makes such a difference when you know it and you do it in training.

Absolutely.

What is the hardest set you have done?

The hardest set I have done? I have got a few, there is one recently that we were doing and it was just absolutely stupid for me but, we were doing this beta alanine test thing which is just a different kind of bicarb and I had to do six 50's on two minutes max and then after that straight on you go 200m max and for me a sprinter I sing out at 5th 50 and then I have to do another 50 and swim a 200m straight off the bat and I couldn't even... I was lactating so much I couldn't even move in that 200m it was just so ridiculous, I hated it I dreaded doing it, so we had to do it three times in the last preparation and I don't think it helped me one bit.

There has been a couple of sets, one that I did that was a really good 200m set that I did with Vince Reily and it was 100 dive 200m swim off 100 push 200 swim off 100 push, 200 swim off. So it was basically you did that 2 or 4 times depending on where you were at and you had to descend each set but you wanted it to be around your 200m time and then the next one was almost your goal time and then it was pretty much whatever you could do. That set was pretty tough, you pretty much do broken 200's with a little bit of swim off in between but I thought that was a pretty good 200m set.



That sounds pretty tough and the longer sets where you get a lot of lactic acid happening then it is pretty painful but you can feel the benefit.

Definitely.

You are probably one of the best underwater kickers that we have got here in Australia what type of training do you do for that?

I have started coaching a little bit and I was talking about this last night just with the age guys at Nunawading Swimming Club and whenever I push off the wall especially where it is backstroke I will be 12m-15m every time. I know the amount of kicks that I need to do, especially if its fast, if its 200 pace or back end speed or max effort I will be 15m every time that is something that I have done the last few years. Whereas if it was drill I would still try and count out my kicks and get close to 15 every time. It's not only doing the kicks it's doing them properly, when I was a little bit younger I still probably did the kicks but I wasn't doing as good technique or I would do it off the first 50 and not off the second 50. Say if you were doing 100m, I think it is pretty important, anyone can push off the first wall and do lots of kicks it's all about the second or the third or fourth wall. Just doing it all the time in training and then we would sort of cross over and have specific underwater stuff where we might do 25 max underwater for time and things like that so that way you can sort of gauge on how your underwater is going.

I will give you another set, this is another Vince set but I got it from Lee Nugent that he used to give it Adrian Radley when he was swimming and it was 82 100's on 3.30, I think we ended up getting them down to 3.10, I am not 100% on that but on the first wall go 15m underwater, second wall go 20m under water, 3rd wall go 25m underwater and then the last will go 30m underwater, all of this continuous and on 3.30, that is probably one non lactate set, I mean you get a bit of lactate because you have got to make the time and stuff, but that was something that we worked on for a little bit and that is probably one of the best underwater sets you could do.

However adding it in there, when you have to go 30m under water it can very easily have bad technique and that is the most important time to really be focusing on it then and trying to get it out, that is a very tough set.



Yeah that sounds pretty good. One of the sets that we do a fair bit is 8 or 10 25's under water on 40 or 45 and that is certainly not as hard as the 8 200's but continuing to practice the underwater work is the best way to improve it. I like what you said about doing it every single time.

How many kicks do you do off each wall to make it to 15?

Is its 100 pace sort of max back end speed I do 12 and if its 200 pace I will be 10-11.

Yep, because they are bigger kicks is it?

Yeah you just sort of slow it down obviously you are not completely sprinting so you knock off one kick, or if you did 12 at a slower pace obviously you would go past the 15. They're the numbers that I use every time I am doing a 50 or a 100 whatever pace it is they are the counts that I use.

That's good, and it gives you something else to concentrate on when you're training too. A goal to hit every lap as well.

Yeah exactly. I think if you count the kicks I don't seem to run out of breath or be really struggling for a breath or anything like that, it's when you haven't counted your kicks and you are like oh I wonder how far I have gone and then you're like I need a breath I need to come up sort of thing... but if you're counting it almost distracts you a little bit as well. Especially in that 200m set if you count your kicks out it is so much easier than if you don't, it just takes your mind off it a little bit and that helps.

Yeah for sure, I find that same thing in training; distract yourself from the pain by counting.

What about your diet? We were talking before and you mentioned some things that you have changed in your diet that have made a big difference what are they?

When I was with Shannon Rowlinson at the AIS I was living with this housemate and it was before nationals and his mum, I think she had her own catering business, she used to cook us these small sticky date puddings and Christmas puddings. He was a rower and when we came home we would cook dinner and have all these things frozen in the freezer and we would cook them up and have them most nights. We would probably have them 4-5 nights a week so we were really putting



away these desserts and there was nothing really wrong with our skin folds, it wasn't that bad but Shannon was always onto the girls about eating chocolate dessert sort of thing and I ended up going to that Nationals and not really going as well as what I would have liked to and especially not as well as what my training had shown. I just remember he got stuck into the girls one day and I sort of thought I will try that as well it shouldn't be so bad and try to fuel my body with the right food. I ended up doing that and cut out chocolate and dessert. It was probably close to a year and within the first 4-5 weeks we got our skin folds done and I normally sat around 35/36 which is a pretty low skin fold and then after about 4-5 weeks I got skin folds done again and they were down to 31 and all I had done was stop eating chocolate and dessert and that was the only thing that I cut out. After Shannon saw that he was like Wow, he was really impressed with how I had cut it out. Then we started to look at a few things and spoke to the dietician and he said you need to make sure you are replacing the dessert with the correct fuel intake for energy levels. It was all about eating the right foods to fuel your body. So you could probably eat a little bit more of the right foods but your body is going to be so much happier and it is going to work better and all that kind of stuff. When I started doing times in training that I never had I was 2kg's lighter and just doing a really good job so I took that on board and tried to be good all the time. I sort of made that decision, it was a lifestyle choice, I wasn't sacrificing anything I had just made the decision that I am not going to eat that stuff. So once I set my mind to it like that I could just do it, as where before I was like no I won't have it because it is bad for me and then I would end up having it anyway. This time I just said no I am not going to eat it. So now I don't feel like it, I barely ever have it and it is just not an option to have it really.



So you went pretty much cold turkey and just said no that is not what I am going to be eating and changed it. That's awesome.

The first week, it is pretty strange and I spoke to the dietician about this that your brain actually craves it like a drug. I would finish dinner and I would know that there would be ice cream in the freezer or whatever happened to be there and would actually be thinking about it nonstop

wanting to have it and then it was only probably 5-6 days then your forget about it and you don't crave it anymore. Then you don't finish your meal and feel like something sweet. It was really quite weird, but then once you get past that 5 days to a week it's like you're home free and it's easy after that.

So what sort of stuff did you replace that with? You mentioned that the dietician said you need to keep up your energy intake, what other foods did you start having?

I started eating dried fruit. I love dried fruit, I like normal fruit, but I started eating a lot of dried mango. If I did want dessert or feel like we had a hard session I would try and eat yoghurt for dessert or have fruit and yoghurt. There is always a healthier option and it was just about making those decisions and putting less butter on your toast or less sauce or whatever it happens to be just little decisions like that where you can cut calories and watch that sort of stuff where you probably don't really need it but you are just so used to having it you do it anyway.

You said your skin folds are pretty low as a result of that and of course the training. You did the clinic down at Traralgon a few weeks ago where you spoke to the younger kids and got in the water. One of the girls that I coach she came back and she said "that Ash Delaney guy he looks pretty good" so that's just another bonus for eating well and training hard. So there you go.

What other things do you focus on in your swimming in terms of technique? What do you think about?

Everyone sort has their things that they need to work on during training and I know for me lately I have just been changing my technique a little bit. It always needs little tweaks and that's where if you have a good coach or you talk to your coach about it that will be the little things that they could sort of mention and say, lift your hips up here or put your head back a little bit, so that is the kind of thing you focus on for that session. For me at the moment I have just worked out with the physio my left glut isn't stabilising really well and so she has given me exercises to do, so I do those before every session then get in and focus on that and that sort of connects me right through and I can just feel it. It is all about feeling and getting that right for every session. I normally give myself one or two things to work on at each session. Most people should know what they need to work on and that is sort of my goal for that session and making sure I get that right, whether I am swimming slow or fast I am always



swimming with good technique. Always concentrate on little things like that then obviously there are other things like your underwater and not breathing off turns or how far you are going to go underwater, all those kind of things. There is always a technical thing that I will be working on whenever I am swimming backstroke.

What about when it comes to a race, what do you focus on then?

Really trying to focus on the process not the outcome. Say for my 100 I have a few key words that I use when I race and that always brings me back to the process. It would be like with the start I know what I need to do, how many kicks I need to do off the start and once I come up I know to be on my arms and not my legs sort of thing and hold that through and build through the 50 sort of thing, so that is my other cue, just keep thinking build, build, build. Then a similar thing for the second 50, so as long you're thinking of the things that you need to do it brings you back and you shouldn't be making mistakes. If you were to say I want to win this race so you go out to hard sort of thing and then you end up burning in the back, that's not going to happen. You want to have a couple of things that would relate back to your training and what you would think about in training to get a good result and then you would use that in your competition, so it is pretty simple when you think about but the mind tends to drift and wants to do other things so it doesn't always happen. However the more times you can keep the same process the more times you are going to get a better result.

Yeah that is a good insight into racing.

Yeah thinking about winning is never really that good unless you are a good five metres in front.

Yeah that's right. One thing my coach always said was don't worry about the people next to you because you can't control what they do you just have to control what you do and that is focusing on what pace you have to go, what you have got to do with your technique, the pace off the wall that sort of thing.

Yep, exactly right.

What about after swimming? What are your plans is it going to be swimming related?



Yeah I think swimming related. Like I said earlier I have just started coaching. I am only doing it two afternoons a week just assisting with the aged national guys at Nunawading but I have been loving that and I have been pretty keen to get into coaching. Then down the track or sometime soon I have just been looking at swim schools, my passion is swimming, I love swimming so to get involved in something like that would be pretty good. That's in motion a little bit but very new and just looking into it, so that could be a direction I might end up heading.

Well that's great, I think you would be a really good coach and no doubt the age national kids at Nunawading are enjoying having you there at the moment. So I can imagine anything that you do after swimming you will be successful at it because you know how to apply yourself, you work hard, and have become a great swimmer. So thanks so much for being on the call.

No problem

It has been great chatting to you and catching up and we will talk to you soon.

Cool, thanks very much.

Let's re-cap what we spoke about with Ash, because I think he mentioned three really good points that apply to all swimmers.

The first one is to focus on the small things in training; and for Ash that is doing 10-12 kicks of every single wall so he gets to 15m in his underwater kicks for backstroke. If you are a freestyler that might be doing a certain stroke count for each lap or it might be holding a breath control for each lap. If you focus on your skills in training, it takes away the focus from how hard the session is to making these little mile stones for every lap that you do.

The second thing he talked about was he cut out all sweets from his diet; that did two things it allowed him to drop two kilos in weight and also allowed him to swim faster in training so his times came down. If you are carrying to less kilo's than normal then that's quite a bit less weight to be carrying through the water so it makes it a lot easier. So if you are struggling to lose that extra kilo or two then give that a shot and just cut out all sweets from your diet.

The last thing he mentioned was in his 100m backstroke he focus' on swimming with arms for the first 60-70% of his race and what that does



is allows him to save his legs for the last 20-30 metres so he can bring it home strong and come over the top of everyone else. I have been testing this in training for the last week and my times have come down 3-4 seconds per 100 just by working my arms for the first 50-75 metres and then bringing in the legs in the last 25-50 metres. The legs are the first things to fatigue when you are swimming because they are the biggest muscles and you are working them the hardest so it is important to swim on your arms as he said and that allows you to save up your leg strength for that last 25-50m. It also applies if you are swimming a 200m/400m or a 1500m the main thing is don't let your legs tire too early so you don't want to bring them in and start kicking hard from the start. You want to swim on your arms because you can use your arms for a lot longer than you can your legs. So if you haven't tried that before in your next session where you are going hard, give that a shot. Swim on your arms for the 50-75% of the race and then start to bring in your legs and you might find that you have a lot more energy to bring it home strong and actually come over the top of people.

I would like to thank-you for joining me on the very first Effortless Swimming podcast, we have a lot more coming so stay tuned, subscribe to us on iTunes and we will see you next episode.

