

“YOU DON’T HAVE TO TOUCH THE WALL FIRST TO WIN THE RACE; YOU JUST HAVE TO APPLY SEVEN POUNDS OF PRESSURE TO THE TOUCHPAD.”

MARK SCHUBERT, NATIONAL COACH US SWIMMING,
ASCA WORLD CLINIC, 2008.

APPROACH

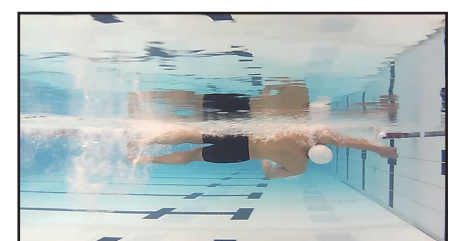
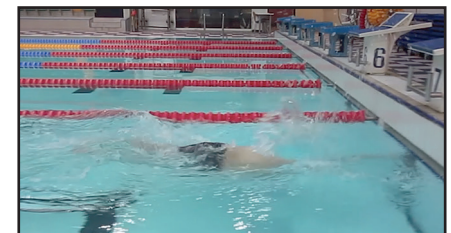
The ‘finish’ starts quite a distance before the end of the race. The technique and effort over the final 5, 10 or even 15m of swimming (“the approach”) can change the ranking order of swimmers and can definitely change the time. The approach is the most important part of a race finish. A strong, aggressive and well timed approach followed by a forceful touch can make **at least 0.3 – 0.5 seconds** difference to a race time and, often, even more.

BACKSTROKE

The swimmer should count their strokes from passing under the flags (5m) into the wall so that they know exactly when they will arrive at the wall. This can be a scary skill to learn for young swimmers, but once learned it can give them a big advantage in their next race.

On the final stroke the swimmer should rotate slightly towards the touching hand (to allow further extension of the shoulder joint) and change the normal backstroke entry (down) to a lunge at the wall (forwards) above, at, or below the surface. A strong, single dolphin kick should accompany the arm lunge. This may cause arching of the back but it should be kept to a minimum. Extreme arching of the back shortens the horizontal length of the body/arm and forces the center of gravity to travel further towards the finish; it may look spectacular but it may lose the race.

Some part of the swimmer’s body must break the surface when the touch is made. This can be the hand, arm, shoulder, head or a single foot, but some part must be above water (SW 6.4).



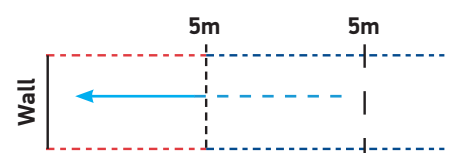
PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Anaerobic ability to ‘lift’ the effort at the last stages of the race.
- Shoulder flexibility for long reach.
- Spatial awareness of the relative positions of the body and the wall and of the swim speed.

TESTING & MONITORING

- 5m timed finishes (time is taken from the head passing the backstroke flag pole to the hand touch).
- 8-10 x 10m/15m swim in at full speed – score how many touches are made with ‘perfect’ stroke timing. Vary the start point somewhat from swim to swim.

BACKSTROKE FINISHES



THE RULES

- SW 6.6 (BACKSTROKE) Upon the finish of the race the swimmer must touch the wall while on the back in his/her respective lane.

COACHING PROCESS & CONTROL

- Once the swimmer has 'finished' the race there are no more opportunities to chase someone, overtake, make up for lost time, or try harder. That's it. It's over. Best to make the best of it.
- "The swimmer's responsibility is to activate the touchpad at the earliest possible opportunity."
- Insist on legal, purposeful finishes on every swim of every set, every day.
- Backstroke flags must be 5m from the wall and must be 1.8m above the water. If your measurements are different your swimmers will have problems when they swim in regulation pools.

LAND EXERCISES

- Shoulder flexibility

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

- Practice, practice, practice.
- Practice stroke counting from the flags at slow, medium and race-pace speeds.
- The phase of the stroke cycle when a swimmer passes under the flags will differ from swim to swim and from lap to lap. Swimmers should learn to adjust the stroke length and/or stroke count to accommodate for this.

INTERPRETING THE RULES

Unlike the **backstroke turn**, the backstroke *finish* demands that the swimmer stay on their back (SW 6.6) but that is defined (SW 6.3) as "up to but not including 90o" so there is plenty of 'wobble room' for swimmers to rotate to one side and enable a longer reach with the finishing arm. The same rule (SW 6.6) insists that they stay in their own lane! For some reason this condition is not mentioned in the finish rules applying to the other strokes but it is included in the backstroke turn rules. The sensible restraint is covered very clearly for all races in SW 10.3 so it is a mystery why it is also included in the backstroke rules.

COMMON FAULTS & FIXES

- Not paying attention to the flags.
- Turning the head to look at the wall.
- Turning onto the front at or before the finish.
- Gliding/kicking in.
- Finishing with a 'short' arm stroke.
- Stopping the kick before the wall is touched.

DESCRIPTIVE WORDS & IMAGERY

Strong, determined, purposeful, forceful, hit the touchpad, stop the clock, lunge.

SEE ALSO

- British Swimming: britishswimming.org
- ASA: swimming.org
- SASA: scottishswimming.com
- WASA: swimwales.org
- BSCA: gbswimcoaches.co.uk