

**Mental skill development**  
**Sport psychology**



## **Performance Profile**

I'm going to do my performance profile on myself. I am a junior Great Britain swimmer on the verge of breaking into the senior team. I compete mainly in the 100 and 200 metres freestyle. Even though I compete at this level I realise that I have main weakness that I need to work on to make that final push to get me in the senior team.

This is my individual performance profile for the 100 and 200 metres freestyle- To be a world-class 100 and 200 metre freestyle you have to have to following characteristics. (This is a personal opinion) I

- Power
- Commitment
- Self-motivation
- Positive attitude
- Good focus
- Confidence
- Strong
- Good skills (good start, turns and finish)
- Tall

These aspects are needed to be a world-class performer, but some aspects are more important than others. I have now rated each aspect 1-10, 10 being the most important that I feel the swimmer will need to be the best.

- To have a lot of Power-10-6
- To be Commitment-10-10
- To be Self-motivation-10-7
- To have Positive attitude-10-8
- To be Good focus-10-7
- To be Confidence-10-7
- To be Strong-10-6
- Having Good skills (good start-10-5, turns-10-5and finish-10-8)
- Need to be Tall-10-8

All these aspects are for the best performers in the world and the numbers next to the other numbers are the aspects that I rate my own performance.

I'm going to now plot my scores against the scores that I rated the best performers in the world. Plotting then in a table will show me the differences between, the top performers in the world and me.

Characteristics	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Power						✓	----	----	----	----
Commitment										✓
Self motivation							✓	----	----	----
Positive attitude								✓	----	----
Good focus							✓	----	----	----
Confidence							✓	----	----	----
To be strong						✓	----	----	----	----
Good skills-turns					✓	----	----	----	----	----
Starts					✓	----	----	----	----	----
Finish								✓	----	----
Need to be tall						✓			----	----
Total								74		110

✓ Is the score I rated my performance

--- Is the difference of my score to the score of the worlds best.

From the table I can identify my strengths and weaknesses. My strengths are that I feel that I'm 100% committed to my sport, which is what you would expect from a world- class performer.

My weakness that is identified from the table is my skills- starts and turns. This is a vital part of the swim and if I'm not at the same standard as the best I can never become the best so this is something that I need to work on in training.

You can see from the total at the bottom of the table, that I would think a world- class swimmer would have a total score of 110 from the aspect that I think would make up an athlete of this standard, and I would only give myself 76. From looking at this table I can easily see what I need to work on to be the best.

## **Full needs**

### **Assessment**

As you can see from the table on the other page, you can see what I think a world-class swimmer in the 100 and 200 metre freestyle would have. This table was only based on my opinion and my own research. My research was only based on information within Great Britain and as we don't really have one of the greatest swimmers in this event in this country it was hard to know what it takes to become the worlds bests.

I needed to have other information to back up the characteristic of a swimmer of this standard. To do this I have asked Ian Turner the Great Britain head swimming coach to do a short interview on what he think it would take to reach the top. I asked Ian because he has been the head coach for 8 years and has been to 4 Olympics. Ian has seen many world records that have been broken and has seen what it takes to do this.

### **Interview**

*What characteristics do you think it would take 100 and 200 metre freestyle to have to become number one in the world?*

'From my own experience I think it would take many different characteristics that are performed at 100% to become the best. The different characteristics that a 100 and 200 swimmer needs to have would be':

- Tall
- Strong
- A perfect technique
- Perfect skills i.e. starts and turns
- Need to work hard in training-committed.

*You didn't mention any characteristics to do with the mind i.e. attitude, do you this is important to be the best?*

'Yes they would need to be very strong in the mind especially when it comes do to the Olympics, it doesn't matter how much training the swimmer has put in no matter how good they are if they don't have a strong head they will not win, and to be the best you need to perform on the biggest stage. Attitude is a major characteristic that a swimmer must have. Swimmers need to get the right balance when it comes down to attitude because they don't want to be full of myself, if they are then they run the risk of under minding there opposition. Swimmers should never under estimate their opposition because if they do they could get unstuck.'

*You mentioned that swimmers much be tall and st rong, why is this?*

'Swimmer needs to be tall and strong especially in the 100 and 200 freestyle because it's a fast race, the 100 is a sprint and the 200 is becoming a sprint event now. You need to be tall because you need to advantage from the start and from the walls. Being tall will get you this advantage, as you will have a longer body and longer legs. Longer legs will let you turn further away from the wall so in theory you swim for less. Swimmers need to be strong because they need to be powerful in the water, if

they a powerful in the water its means that you can pull more water and faster. To get this power, swimmers will need to be in the gym lifting weights least twice a week. '

*How tall do you think a 100 and 200 metre swimmer should be?*

'On average I think swimmers that are in the 100 and 200 metres are between 6ft 2in to anything up to 6ft 7in.'

## **Weaknesses**

From the table I can identify my own weaknesses. My weaknesses are:

- My start
- My turns
- My height
- My focus (even though my focus got a good mark it could still do with being better)

The mental strategies I'm going to use to improve my weaknesses are visual imagery mental blocking of other swimmers and goal setting.

Starts- my starts are very poor compared to other swimmers especially to the swimmers at the top level. I realise that I need to work on my starts in training and practice then a lot, but it's not all down to training and practicing them.

When I come to race I know I'm going to be last of the blocks and behind at the start of the race. I have come to terms with being behind and accept it; normally I don't work on them because I know it's a weakness. I need to learn over a 3 week period how mentally I can prepare for a good start and being with other swimmers at the start of the race or in front.

I'm going to mentally prepare for my race weeks prior to the competition; I'm going to do this by visual imagery.

Visual imagery is where an athlete sits in a quite place, closes their eye and things of a perfect situation with their weakness. In my case I will sit down, close my eyes and think about the perfect start. With visual imagery, if you put your mind to it you should be able to hear the sounds and smell the things you should before your competition.

I'm going to run through the start of the race in my head before the competitions. The start will not be a normal start for me but it will be a perfect start. The reason I'm going to do this is so I get used to doing good starts every time, hopefully this will result in me having a good start on the day of the race. Plus it will get my mind around the fact that I can do a good start.

When I'm going to visualise my start I will visualise every aspect of the start, including my walk on poolside before the race, standing behind the blocks, getting on the blocks and the actual start itself.

"Visualising an aspect of a race and running through it in your mind is the next best thing to racing" (Dr Adam Borrows, sports psychologist, Cardiff, Nov 2002)

This quote is from a sports psychologist that I visit in Cardiff every 3 months or so.

Turns- my turns are again very poor against the top swimmers in the world; this is very common that people with bad starts don't have the greatest turns. I have again

identified that's is a weakness and I'm going to try and improve them by using mental skills over a 3 week period.

As with my starts I'm going to use visual imagery to try and improve them.

"Swimmers visualise their race as it can be done at any time any place, plus you don't need a swimming pool to do it." (Dr Adam Borrows, sports psychologist, Cardiff, Nov 2002)

I'm going to visualise my turns at different times of the day and at different places (different pools). I'm going to do it at different times because I'm not always in the mood to think about swimming and I think that if I think about my turns when I'm not in the mood to think about swimming it should help when I come down to do it for real. I think this because if I can think about the perfect turn and go over it in my head it will make it easier when the pressure is on in a race.

I'm going to visualise it in different place because I might find myself in a situation where in the pool isn't how I visualised it and I will need to perfect the turn. I can't perfect the turn if I'm worrying about if the wall is slippery or something like that. Once I get into the pool I will practice my turns perfectly but at a slow pace to start with. Once I have perfected them at a slow pace I will up the pace and try a perfect then at the new pace and I will continue this until I can do a perfect turn at race pace. "It's a foolish idea that if you do a little more, faster, then you'll be better than the rest. It ignores the fact you must train at your optimum level correctly before you up the tempo." (Rob De Castella- director of the AIS- 1997)

I'm also going to use another intervention strategy to increase the performance of my starts and turns. I'm going to use goal setting. Goal setting is where the athlete sits down and thinks of goals that they want to achieve over a period of time. You can get two different types of goals- long term and short term. Long-term goal might be something that you want to achieve over your career, and a short-term goal may be something you want to achieve over the next month or session.

Goals- should be made by the athlete only, but they can have help making them. The reason behind this is that the athlete needs to believe that they can achieve the goal instead of being told that they can achieve it. Should be realistic- if the goal isn't realistic then the athlete may give up easily and become de-motivated. The goal must have a time limit but the time limit must also be realistic. If the time limit is too short and unrealistic then the athlete if they don't meet the target could again become de-motivated. If the time limit is too long then once the athlete has met the target they may slack off or not rush to meet their target.

I'm going to use goal setting to try and improve my starts and turns. I'm going to set target for myself to improve my skills.

I'm going to set time limit of three weeks. My target is for my starts and turns to improve over the three-week period. I'm going to try and improve them by practising each day, hopefully having a goal to work towards and practising them each day they should improve.

Height- my height is a weakness because I'm only 6ft 2in and I'm at the bottom of the average height for swimmers who compete in the 100 and 200 metres freestyle and it means that I have to in theory swim further than swimmers who are taller than me. I can't do anything about this and I realise I might not stop growing yet.

What I'm going to do is try mental strategies to help me not to get worried about people that are tall than me and that are in my race.

If I'm worrying about people that are taller than me before my race it means that I'm not fully focused. I can expect to race to the best of my ability if I'm not fully focused.

A way to get around this is to make myself feel bigger and taller or to blank out all the other competitors in the race.

I'm going to learn over the next 3 weeks to try and blank the other competitors out and pretend to be swimming against my self and one on else. A way to do this is to be fully focused and to just think about each aspect of your race, when all the other swimmers are being gathered and put in the right lanes for the race. Once behind your block you need to pretend that you have black curtains down each side of your line so you block everyone out. This will help me as I'm not as tall as some of the other swimmers, but I won't realise this, as I won't be noticing them.

"When I stand behind the all I can see this one lane and two black curtains down each side, the race is between me and the clock"

(Ian Thorpe- 200, 400-metre freestyle world record holder – quote from the Olympic 2000 Australia)

I'm going to practice this strategy in training on hard sets. I'm going to try and isolate myself within the lane and purely focus on my own performance. I think this will feel very strange to start with, as when you training with a group of people you get involved in other peoples training.

My focus was the weakest psychological aspect. I believe my focus is good but if I can improve it, it will give me a great advantage when it comes to race.

Before I race I don't really think about anything, I just know what time I need to report and then I go and swim. I going to use pre race focusing I try and improve my focus before I swim. I'm going to set out my own personal pre race warm up. This should increase my focus because I wont be thinking about what to do in the warm up and I'll be able to just get in the warm up and do my personal thing. It will give me extra time to think about the race; it will also keep me focused in the warm up. This will help me before my race, as I will of have more time to prepare for my race while doing my warm up.

I'm going to start these strategies on the 28/10/2002 and then I will review if these strategies work, as I will have a student national competition at the end of the 3 weeks. -15/11/2002.

## **Psychological Profile**

### **Post 3 weeks**

After 3 weeks of mentally thinking about my swimming and thinking about my weaknesses I'm now going to see if it has helped me to become the swimmer I'm aiming for.

Starts- As my starts were very poor, I have put more effort in mentally to correct these. If I could have improved my starts by a small margin it would make a massive difference.

I started off trying to improve my starts by visualising them through each different stage. I would visualise my starts in my room, before I went to bed, in the day and when I got up, I did this for most days. Each time I thought about my start I would visualise myself doing the perfect start each time. After I visualised the start it made me feel as if I can perform it perfectly, I went to training thinking that I would dive in and blow everyone away. Visualising the start gave me great confidence as before I would just get on the block I know I was going to do a bad dive.

When visualising the start I would start to get the feeling I was going to race, in a little way I would start and get nervous.

Once I was at training I would practice my start every session. I would train 9 times a week so that was 9 times that I would practice them. I felt if I over practiced them it could turn the other way and I would be practicing them when I'm tired and it would be doing me more harm than good.

In training I reached my goal in improving my start. This is good but I now had to improve my start in a race. One thing it did do was give me a lot of confidence going into the competition.

#### **The result**

After training on my starts for 3 weeks it was now time to see if all the practice has paid off. I was racing at the students national at the end of the 3 weeks and I thought this would be the perfect opportunity to see how they had improved, if any.

#### **Start**

Before my race I had a lot more confidence, which helped my race anyway. Once behind the blocks I thought that I was going to do the best dive of my life. Once I stood on the block I still felt like this. I dove in and it was for me a good start but it wasn't the start I was hoping for.

I believe that visualising my start helped me to gain a good start, and think that I need more time to practise them. I was pleased that for the first time I had done something like this resulted in a good dive. I will be continuing visualising by diving as I feel it will help me to perform a perfect dive in the future.

I think I partly meet my goal. I improved a lot in training but I think the pressure of the race hindered my start. It's given me confidence and I now know that my starts can improve.

#### **Turns**

Again before my race I thought I would perform a perfect turn. I was competing in the 100 metres short course this means that it's 4 lengths and I would have to do 3 turns. Once I dove in I was looking for the wall believing that I would do a great turn. My



first turn was a great turn for me but it still wasn't a perfect turn that you expect from a swimmer completing at the top level. After the first turn I had to aim for the second turn. In a normal race for me my turn would get worst, as I got more tired. The second turns was only a fraction slower that the first one, this is a first for me as normally it would be a lot slower. After the second turn I knew I had already done two turns that are normally better than I usually do. The third turn again was slower than the first and second but I would expect this, as I was getting more and more tired. Looking back on my race I was very pleased the way my turns went. One thing I noticed was the difference in speed from the first to the third; there wasn't much difference, which is a good thing. I do believe that visualising my turn's help me a great deal and it is something that I will be doing in the future. I feel I did reach my goal, as my turns didn't drop lot from the first to the last. I feel goal setting helped me more on my turns than my start because I practised my turns a lot more in training.

### Feeling Tall

Because it was a university competition there was a few swimmers that were my age, and they weren't that much bigger than me. There were a few older swimmers that were bigger than me, but as it was the biggest competition of the session it didn't affect me that much. I think that this competition wasn't the right competition to practice this, as I wasn't nervous. When I get nervous I tend to look around at the other swimmers and the size of them tends to put me off. I will continue to practice making myself look and feel bigger as I think looking around at the start of the race isn't a good thing to do.

### Focusing

Focusing on my race more in the warm up did help me a lot as I felt more confident. It give me more time after my warm up to really thing about me race I feel the more time you can get to think about your race the better and its something I will keep. As I had a good race I will keep the race warm up that I did on the day and take it to other competitions.

I believe that preparing myself mental before a race is a good thing and I will be doing it in the future.

Characteristics	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Power						✓	-----	-----	-----	-----
Commitment										✓
Self motivation							✓	-----	-----	-----
Positive attitude								✓	-----	-----
Good focus							✓	✓	-----	
Confidence							✓	-----	-----	-----
To be strong						✓	-----	-----	-----	-----
Good skills-turns					✓	✓	-----	-----	-----	-----
Starts					✓	✓	-----	-----	-----	-----
Finish								✓	-----	-----
Need to be tall						✓			-----	-----
Total							74	77		110

As you can see my personal profile went from 74 point to 77 point I will keep up the strategies in future.

## **Index**

Page 1-2	Performance Profile
Page 3-5	Full needs assessment
Page 6-10	Psychological Profile
Page 11	Bibliography

## **Bibliography**

Adam Borrows Nov 2002 personal sports psychologist Cardiff.

Rob De Castella 1997- AIS website [www.ais.swimming.au](http://www.ais.swimming.au)

Ian Turner 2002 Interview

Ian Thorpe 2000 personal comment at the Sydney Olympic 2000