

Backstroke Clinic 23/8/25

Notes by Barry Green

On Saturday 23/8/25, 21 swimmers and 3 observers (Tricia Summerfield, Peter Lyster, Barry Green) gathered (on time) at the outdoor 8 lane pool (50 m) for a backstroke clinic. As usual Elena Nesci (the coach) had some challenges for us (with about 30 minutes on dryland and 30 minutes in the water).

Dryland

Elena took us through some warmup drills: rotating arms in opposite directions move hip[s and arms to assist the back swing), swinging arms alternately to the back (above and below), swinging an arm to above the head (alternate), leg swings (balancing foot forms a tripod – 2 points at the ball and 1 point at the heel).

Before discussing the boards, she had prepared, Elena pointed out the backstroke is the “simplest” stroke (least number of component parts). Like freestyle it is a vertical axis stroke (axis from head to toes through centre of body) but it differs in that there is no overlap of strokes as in freestyle where there is partial overlap. All other strokes have a visual processing of the bottom of the pool!

On board 1 Elena had developed the mnemonic **BACK**

B – breathing. A breathing pattern is essential to building the stroke (no breath-holding or over-breathing). This is a personal choice but through the mouth, in and out in one stroke cycle is a start. You may augment for sprinting as the stroke rate increases so as not to hyperventilate

A – angle (rotation). Rotation is from the hips and the arm should come through close to the head with dry arm pit facing up to the sky. The opposite shoulder should come above the water. The head should not move.

C – catch. The catch occurs as soon as possible after entry and the arm should be “wrapped around” your best friend’s shoulders (elbow higher than hand and shoulder if mobility allows). The rest of the stroke after the catch is pull, push, recover, then entry.

K – kick. Because there is a bigger pause between propulsions in this stroke than in freestyle it is important to keep the legs kicking. Even if the leg kick is not strong some kick must be maintained to ensure that the legs do not sink and so cause drag. The kick should come from the hip, be shallow and kick up strongly.

Finally – work with the water, reduce drag, increase propulsion.

On board 2 Elena stressed the following:

Kick flick – up, narrow, fast, (this is true of all strokes but with breaststroke acceleration is also important)

Catch early & hold – in (hand entry), out (turn hand out), down (hold the water and push towards feet) and lift (hand exit). Try and catch as much water as you can push. I think what is meant here is entry, catch, pull, push, recover.

Angle (rotation) - shoulders, hips. For masters this should be hip driven with the whole body following the hips including the legs i.e., everything rotates as a unit.

Water Drills (all done with fins)

1. Arms by the side – head up, good body position, Concentrating on kick technique the kick flick.
2. Start off as for 1 and introduce rotation (arms by the side, head still, eyes to sky/ceiling). Half the pool rotation to one side, then finish the pool with rotation to the other side. As hips reach surface flick the top hand up about 10cm as if initiating the start of the recovery then drop down.
3. As for 2 but now one arm recovery (don't worry about catch or arm propulsion). One length for each arm. Focus on shoulders and hips leading the arm exit and entry timing.
4. As for 3, but now concentrate of catch, push, and drive to recovery. One length for each arm.
5. As for 4 but now both arms (as in the stroke). Ensure that the hand entry is at shoulder width apart.