



## STROKE READINESS IN CHILDREN (JANE MARSDEN)

Recently, we have had some parents ask if their infant or toddler was ready to join a "no parent" and/or "more advanced" class. Children as young as two were perceived as perhaps ready to "ditch the songs, the toys and the magic mat" in favour of rigorous stroke development.

It is tempting to construe water confidence and good underwater or above-water propulsion (with or without breathing) as evidence that a child needs more advanced tuition. Indeed, our AUSTSWIM instructors are trained to spot children who would welcome more challenging exercises within the context of the infant/toddler with-parent program, such as swims of greater distances and deep water skills (i.e. we have "advanced" with-parent classes, "intermediate" with-parent classes and "beginner" with-parent classes).

However, it is important to remember that children under four years of age "lack the application to apply themselves to the repetition necessary to consolidate disciplined movements predetermined by others" (Ron Coleman, *Swimming Australia*, September 2009). While three-year-olds can be efficient freestyle kickers, "it is doubtful whether they are coordinated enough to expect quality technique". This means that while you may get some progress in children under four or five, it will take a longer time and the standard of stroke will be less. This can be extremely frustrating, boring and even damaging to the self-esteem of the child.

Quite simply, a stroke development class is not appropriate for their stage of development. According to Coleman, "there is ample evidence to suggest there are a whole range of skills to be learned prior to (say) freestyle." These are the guidelines for readiness to learn freestyle (or any stroke) recommended by Coleman:

- The child should have reasonably well-established deep water skills (competent and confident in deep water).
- The child should know what it is that they are expected to learn (i.e. they need to be able to process visual and verbal information at a certain level).
- The child should feel a need for the skill we are asking them to learn. A (younger) child who sees the water as a place for spontaneous play may view an insistence on structured repetition as an interruption to their play time.
- The child should be mentally and emotionally ready for the discipline of practising controlled movements imposed on them by the teacher.
- The child should be physically well-coordinated enough to expect good results in a reasonable length of time.



Toddlers like Austin and Ryan (pictured with their parents and teacher Sam) require swim classes which are more like spontaneous play than structured stroke lessons. This need to play helps them discover how they interact with their aquatic environment.

### TERM 4 2009 DATES

#### Turf City

Monday, October 19 to Sunday, December 13 (except October 17 and November 27)

#### Holland Road

Monday, October 19 to Saturday, December 12 (except October 17 and November 27)

#### Sunday Classes & Sunday Squad at AISS

Sunday, October 18 to Sunday, December 13

#### After-School Classes at AISS

Monday, October 19 to Wednesday, December 9

#### Tuesday and Thursday Squad

Tuesday, October 20 to Thursday, December 10

All Holland Road and Turf City classes will resume on Monday, January 4, 2010. Tuesday and Thursday Squad restart on January 5, 2010. Sunday Classes at AISS and Sunday Squad at AISS resume on Sunday, January 10, 2010. After-school classes at AISS restart on Monday, January 25, 2010.

## FREESTYLE STARTS (JASON MARSDEN)

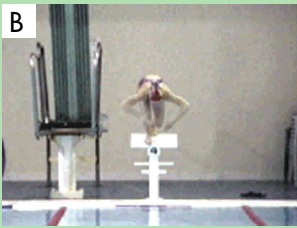
A good start is often the difference between finishing first or trailing behind. The starts take a lot of practice and should only be done in pools that are suitably deep (1.8m minimum).

Stage 1, Take Your Mark: Before the beep sounds, all swimmers must be completely still. Your centre of gravity should be as close to the front of the block as possible. Many believe the track start is best for getting your centre of gravity as far forward as possible. You want to get off the block quickly and powerfully.

The swimmer pictured in photo A is using the track start (one foot on the front of the block and one foot at the back). His head is down, his bottom up, and his back straight. His hands



**PLEASE REMEMBER: ONLY TWO MAKE-UPS PER TERM!**



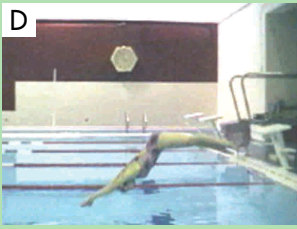
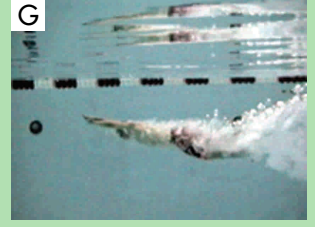
are wrapped around the front of the block (grab start). The big toe is also wrapped around the front of the block.



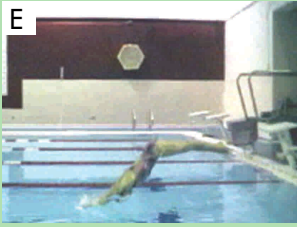
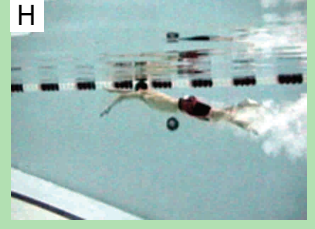
Stage 2, The Pop Up: The first movements after the beep starter has sounded. The arms are moving up and forward and the head comes up, as in photo B.



Stage 3, The Launch: The swimmer drives their legs forward while thrusting their arms up and out over the water. Explode forward! The head of the swimmer in photograph C is in line with her spine. Her arms have moved up and out, quickly leading the way. Her legs have sprung forward. Do not fall into the water rather than driving up and out over the water. If you do, you will hit the water with very little air time.



Stage 4, The Flight: This is what happens between your feet leaving the block and your hands entering the water. You travel three to ten times faster in the air than in the water. You want as much air time as possible! This swimmer's arms are stretched out, leading the way (photograph D). Her legs are fully extended with the toes pointed. Her arms are pointing at the spot she wants to hit. The head is in line with the spine. She is in a pike position. Her arms are squeezed against her ears. Her hands are on top of each other and pointed at the water. This will create a hole for her body to slide through. Her upper body is streamlined.



Stage 5, The Entry: How you hit the water in this stage is critical to your start. The last thing you want to do is crash into the water. You really want to slip smoothly into the water with very little resistance. One hand is on top of the other. This creates that hole for the body to slide through. The swimmer's back in photograph E is arched and her hands start to point upwards as she goes into the water. This will keep her from going too deep. Do not enter at too steep an angle! If your legs are bent or your feet are coming apart (as in photograph F), you will not

have an efficient streamline.

Stage 6, The Breakout: The swimmer starts to kick hard. This swimmer (photograph G) has not started his pull until he is ready to break through the water surface. His head breaks the water surface about the same time as the breakout pull is complete (photograph H).

Enjoy practising this important skill.

## GROUP DISCOUNT TO FINA SWIMMING WORLD CUP 2009!

Catch the final leg of the FINA/ARENA swimming world cup series, featuring world record holders like Aaron Peirsol, Lisbeth Trickett, Jessicah Schipper and Eamon Sullivan competing for gold against Singapore's Olympic finalist Tao Li and Asian Youth Games Most valuable Player, Quah Ting Wen. The event will be held at Singapore Sports School, 1 Champions Way, off Woodlands Drive 17, on November 21-22. Heats start at 8.30am and finals at 4pm on both days (check out [www.finaworldcup.com.sg](http://www.finaworldcup.com.sg) for event details). Marsden Swim School has secured a group booking discount of \$10 per two-day ticket (usual price: \$30 per two-day ticket) but there is a deadline, so please contact Jane on 96219965 as soon as possible to secure your discounted tickets.

## PLEASE SUPPORT OUR SWIM CLASSES IN CAMBODIA THIS JANUARY

In July, Jason and Jane Marsden conducted a seven-day program of water safety/swim classes for the enthusiastic orphans at Kais Village Community, two hours' south of Phnom Penh. This Cambodia- and UK-registered charity provides a home for children aged three days to 13 years, about 20 of whom have special needs. Our swim classes were enjoyed particularly by the disabled children who up until then had never experienced the freedom of moving in water. If you would like to help Marsden Swim School continue sending teachers to Kais Village Community ([www.kaiskids.org](http://www.kaiskids.org)), please contact Jane Marsden on 96219965.



Teacher Jason Marsden with Tieng and Mao, two Cambodian orphans who benefited from a week of swim classes in Treng Treoung.

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