

# **PERSONAL BEST:**

**A Swimmer's Handbook for Racing Excellence**

**Brent S. Rushall, Ph.D., R.Psy.**

**San Diego State University**

**and**

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Brent S. Rushall  
4225 Orchard Drive  
Spring Valley  
California  
USA  
91977  
(619-469-1537)

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## PREFACE

This handbook is meant for serious swimmers who wish to implement better psychological control in their racing. It also should be helpful to coaches. For a swimmer's use, it most likely will be necessary to have a "second party" assist in implementing the principles and directions. An understanding parent, another serious swimmer, or a coach would most probably serve that role. It indicates the basic psychological skills and procedures that have to be developed in maturing and established swimmers.

The information concentrates on characteristics and actions to produce the best and most consistent competitive performances. It represents the opposite end of the performance spectrum to that of the novice age-group swimmer. The tactics for race preparation for swimmers new to competing have been described elsewhere (Rushall, 1994).

To encourage and promote an athlete to achieve his/her best, that individual's needs must be met. The determination of those needs is a large part of the art of coaching. This handbook is designed for the individual.

This handbook is basic. More advanced exercises, further principles and characteristics, and detailed descriptions of pre-race and racing procedures are included in *Mental skills training for sports*<sup>1</sup>. The ideal method for developing refined psychological preparations for and conduct of competitive performances would be to follow the instructions of that text. However, for introductory purposes that will still prove to be very useful and beneficial, this primer is satisfactory.

The content described in the following chapters is the "bare bones" of effective preparatory psychology. An objective for any user should be to understand and include all that is described.

Mental skills training is not easy nor an instant procedure. It takes concentrated and dedicated repetition and progressive development to achieve. It is analogous to the development of physical skills. Repetitions at practice, analysis, and planned progressions that gradually introduce elements in a logical manner are required. There are no "short cuts." The impact of implementing the skills contained in this handbook will be dramatic. Competition psychology is the factor that determines how well one competes after effective physical and skill training has been experienced.

Good luck with your racing.

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<sup>1</sup> Rushall, B. S. (1992). *Mental skills training for sports*. Spring Valley, CA: Sports Science Associates.