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## STRIP POKER

A swim drill to cure your ills

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# STRIP POKER

## A cure-all swim drill

By Drew Surinsky

The knuckle-drag drill is among the oldest and most useful technique drills for swimmers at every level. It was the first drill I learned when my coach taught it to me in 1971, and it's still among my most recommended as a professional swim coach. To perform knuckle-drag, swim freestyle and drag your knuckles across the water's surface during the stroke's recovery phase. This drill, (also known as the finger-tip drag drill, marionette drill, hand-drag drill, broken arm drill and many others), has a simple principle: you use the water's surface as a convenient source of extra kinesthetic feedback to reinforce good recovery mechanics.

If you want to actually do some prescriberecovering during the recovery, nearly all freestylers should recover with

a high elbow and limp forearm, and the knuckle-drag encourages this form. Accordingly, the drill is usually prescribed to correct a sky-armed (hand above the elbow) or a side-armed recovery. The knuckle-drag drill is great for these, but it helps so many other flaws that it's almost a Swiss Army Knife for swimming. The knuckle-drag is a tonic for all of the following and more:

**Sky/side-armed recovery:** Cues proper form with direct feedback

**Poor body rotation:** Your body must rotate to get your elbow high enough. Also, lifting the elbow produces body roll.

**Poor hand entry:** Your hand never leaves the water, so entry is seamless with recovery.

**Legs fight body rotation:** When done with a buoy, legs roll with the body.

Having sung the praises of knuckle-dragging, let me suggest the "strip poker set" to maximize its usefulness. The set is low on exertion and high on relaxed focus, so it's a great warm-up. It involves four repeats of the same distance; repeats of 50 to 150 yards are long enough to find a groove but short enough to concentrate the entire time. Let's assume 4 x 100. If you're not already familiar with the knuckle-drag, practice it on its own before trying this set. (If you're not yet comfortable with the original drill, the accessories will annoy and distract you rather than help you learn.)

### THE STRIP POKER SET

**1 x 100 knuckle-drag, very relaxed, using both pull-buoy and flippers.** I know alarms are going off because flippers are for kicking and pull-buoys are expressly for not kicking. Use them both anyway because the flippers are not for kicking—they're for amplified feedback. Using the buoy makes you a little tippy and further enhances the rotation already produced by the drill. The buoy also holds your legs together. As your body rolls through this drill, and your legs roll with it, the flippers will amplify the kinesthetic sensation that the legs receive. In this first 100, just by keeping the elbows high and the forearms loose, your torso will roll, your legs will stay together and roll with your torso, and you'll get extra feedback from the flippers.

**1 x 100 knuckle-drag.** Remove the flippers and use only the buoy. The buoy is still there to help you roll and keep the legs together, but the flippers are no longer there to amplify the feedback. Now that you know what to tune into, you can do it without the flippers if you focus. You're gradually weaning yourself off the help.

**1 x 100 knuckle-drag.** Remove the buoy. Now you have no help other than the drill itself. Drill without the toys but remember how it felt with them. Try to roll as you did with the buoy. You'll need to kick now, but let your legs roll with your body.

**1 x 100 swim.** Stop drilling and just swim, but let the drill's feel seep into your swimming. Good swimming is almost knuckle-dragging, so recover with the elbows high and the forearms hanging loosely, like a rope swinging from a crane. The hand should just barely miss the water.

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