



TOTAL IMMERSION

The Revolutionary Way
to Swim Better, Faster, and Easier

RY LAUGHLIN with JOHN DELVES



Praise for Total Immersion from world-class competitors to weekend athletes

"This book can help anyone learn to be a better swimmer, regardless of ability. Terry Laughlin's explanation of proper technique and his unique system for practicing it will help anyone swim better. He easily makes an improved stroke simple for the novice, yet I've seen his methods work for elite swimmers too."

—David Marsh, 1996 United States Olympic Team Coach;
Head Coach, Auburn University

"Terry Laughlin is the 90s innovator on how to swim correctly. His approach to teaching swimming is well-thought-out, precisely methodical, and he has been able to I.D. the three key elements to better swimming no matter your skill level. I have witnessed it work!"

—Gerry Rodrigues, Publisher of *SWIM* magazine;
Masters World Champion; Head Coach of UCLA Masters

"The most valuable service a good coach provides is to sharpen your stroke technique, not make you work harder. Terry Laughlin has done an outstanding job of simplifying that complex subject, providing practical tools that will let anyone be his or her own best coach."

—Eddie Reese, United States Olympic Team Coach 1992 and 1996;
Head Coach NCAA Champion University of Texas

"Finally! For over four years I've been looking for ways to get faster in the water by coaching myself. In just two days of Total Immersion training I learned enough to change the way I think about swimming. Terry Laughlin actually taught me how to teach myself. And whenever I need a refresher, the skills for that are right at my fingertips too."

—Mike Pigg, World Champion Triathlete

"*Total Immersion* will do more to improve your triathlon performance than any other coaching or training method."

—*Triathlete* magazine

"This book is a wonderful contribution to swimming. I am so impressed that I shall immediately be distributing it to my swim school teachers and coaches."

—Forbes Carlile, M.B.E., M.Sc., Australian Olympic Team Coach;
Director, Carlile Swimming Organization

"How many people can say that they swam around Manhattan—28.5 miles—and had fun doing it? Thank you so much for helping to make my marathon swim such a memorable experience. I'll tell anyone who is serious about improving their swimming that *Total Immersion* is the answer."

—Don Walsh

"Your instruction has made a radical difference in my fitness swimming. Swimming has gone from one more thing to check off my list to one of the most rewarding parts of my day."

—Jenny Frederick

". . . I learned more about swimming fast with less effort than I have during thirty years of competitive and Masters swimming. I'd recommend *Total Immersion* to anyone wanting to swim better or faster regardless of their swimming background."

—Bill Geiser

"Thanks for a great learning experience. Terry Laughlin is an excellent teacher with a masterful understanding of the interconnection between mind and muscle. I got exactly what I needed to become a better swimmer."

—Joe Neri

"My friends can't believe how much I improved . . . I've already taken an amazing 40 seconds off my best time for 800 meters!"

—Joanne Lazzaro

T o t a l Immersion

**The Revolutionary Way to Swim
Better, Faster, and Easier**

**Terry Laughlin
with John Delves**

**A Fireside Book
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FIRESIDE

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*I dedicate this book to three gentlemen from
the world of swimming who enriched my life beyond measure:*

*To coach Dick Krempecki, who coached me at St. John's University,
who inspired me to want to be a swimming coach.*

*To coach Bill Irwin, who coached me at Manhasset Swim Club,
who inspired me to be a swimming coach who teaches.*

*To coach Bill Boomer, who opened my eyes
to a whole new way of teaching.*

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

With a busy schedule of workshops to teach and a business to run, I could never have found the time to write this book without the invaluable assistance of numerous people who deserve my thanks: John Delves, since 1990 my most valued editor and friend as well, for turning some great thoughts on swimming into a great read. My brother, Steve Laughlin, for turning words about swimming drills into pictures that anyone can follow. My friends and colleagues, Denise Ullrich and David Cohen, who run the operational side of Total Immersion, allowing me to put all of my energies into coaching and writing about swimming. My daughters, Fiona, Cari, and Betsy, for sharing their dad with swimmers all over America each weekend. To my editor at Simon & Schuster, Becky Cabaza, whose enthusiasms for swimming and for the printed word, not to mention her patience, were the perfect combination of qualities for this project. And finally, to my wife and partner, Alice, for urging me to commit my ideas to paper, for organizing my life and providing as much support as any swimming coach has ever received.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

You are about to begin an adventure that, like all adventures, is going to change you a little. It will, that is, as long as you can keep yourself open-minded enough to give new ideas a chance. If you can, all the way through this book, I promise that by the end, you'll no longer think of water and swimming the way you used to. You'll understand what good swimming is *really* about, and just how you can achieve it for yourself.

It doesn't matter if you're brand-new to the sport, a regular looking around for tips on how to improve, or a frustrated "old-timer" who's "known it all" for years but still can't seem to squeeze any more speed out of that stroke of yours. *Total Immersion: The Revolutionary Way to Swim Better, Easier, and Faster* is a better-swimming game plan for all adults, from lap and fitness swimmers to triathletes and former college competitors who once lived, breathed, ate, and slept the sport. The Total Immersion self-help program will do nothing less than give you all the tools you need to be your own best coach, no matter who you are, no matter how well you currently swim. And I can promise that you'll come to enjoy the sport more than you ever have before.

Everyone knows swimming is the most nearly perfect exercise, whether you're in your teens, 20s, 30s, or—especially—in middle age and beyond. It's a great workout that's easy on the joints.

But there's a discouraging myth about swimming too, the myth that you have to plod through thousands of boring laps to be any good; "following the black line," it's called with a fatalistic shrug. It's a fiction that discourages people from getting into the pool and enjoying themselves. Just as bad, it also prevents swimmers already there from

becoming far better. Small wonder that although 80 million Americans consider swimming their favorite form of exercise, according to *Swimming World* magazine, few ever swim well enough to become fit. The American Swimming Coaches Association and the National Swim School Association both estimate that only 2 percent of all Americans can swim a quarter-mile without stopping. That's not a random distance, unfortunately. It's the minimum for a decent aerobic workout.

Total Immersion can change that. Following the black line is out. Learning and practicing are in. This book will show you how to swim better and enjoy your pool time far more, using the techniques I've developed during 30 years of coaching and swimming. My method is unlike anyone else's, and this book is too. *Total Immersion* will change the very way you think of your body as it moves through water, whether for fun or for exercise.

The core of the program is this: The body struggles to learn complicated motions—like a fluid and powerful swim stroke. But it easily masters the simple ones into which every complicated motion can be broken. So in the Total Immersion program, you start from the ground up, gradually and easily assembling all the parts of an improved stroke using the unique, "bite-size" skill drills. Then, since the body can faithfully do what "feels right" as long as it knows what that is, I have designed what I call sensory skill practice. It makes correct swimming instinctive and intuitive instead of something you have to constantly think about and labor over.

Use this book the same way. It will work most effectively for you if you read the whole thing first, to see how the pieces of this novel puzzle gradually fit together and what each one will do for you. But chances are you won't want to wait that long to get started, especially when you see how thoroughly each simple step is explained and how easy it is to master. If you'd prefer to "swim while you study," that's fine too. Here's the best way to make the book work for you that way.

Part One, Chapters 1 to 8, is the core of the better-swimming techniques I teach at my Total Immersion workshops. You'll first learn why swimming lap after lap has done you frustratingly little good, and what you'll now do instead. Subsequent chapters show you why the *position of your body*, not the *pull of your arms*, is the key to swimming better fast, and how you can become balanced and "slippery." Once you've finished Chapter 3, try the simple "drag-eliminating" exercises a couple of times and watch what happens. These body-streamlining exercises are the foundation of everything to come. And as unconventional as it all seems at first, the proof is there, based on principles of ship design and everyday physics that have somehow never before been applied to swimming instruction.

Skill drills, the step-by-step core of the Total Immersion learning process, come next. They're so simple to explain that you could skip to Chapter 8 and start doing them right away, but they'll mean more—and probably work faster for you—if you understand *why* they work, what they feel like when they are working properly, and how you'll gradually integrate them into your regular swimming, covered in Chapters 4 through 7.

Chapter 8 is where we officially leave the classroom behind and start developing the individual bite-size movements that will ultimately be put together into your new, smoother swim stroke. It's organized logically into four lessons, each of which builds on the one before. It's important to do them in order, but the pace is yours. Don't move on to the next lesson until you're completely comfortable with the one you've been working on. When you've finished each lesson, go back to Chapters 6 and 7 for the drill-swim and sensory skill practices that will make what you've practiced a permanent part of your stroke. You'll find a sample, step-by-step plan for going about this in the appendix.

Now that you're swimming a new way, you should train differently

too. So Part Two explains how and why, proving the Total Immersion principle that "fitness is something that happens to you while you're practicing good technique." You'll see that, from now on, moving right always comes before muscle power. And you'll get better results from the time you have to spend in the pool. You'll enjoy it far more too.

With the theory and practice of the Total Immersion program under your belt, you're ready to face the future. Swimming right is something most people want to enjoy for a long, long time, and the advice in Part Three on strength training, weight loss, and injury prevention will help make that possible. So will the exciting possibilities for doing things you may never have tried—from making new friends by joining U.S. Masters Swimming to "racing" a postal meet where you mail in your times.

The message is simple. Forget everything you've heard about swimming. What you "know" is *wrong*. It is too complicated, difficult to follow, frustrating, and, worst of all, probably wastes your energy and time concentrating on the wrong things. To become a good swimmer you need neither brawn nor youth, great athleticism nor impressive endurance. You need skill, and you need smart training. With this book as your swim partner, you will have both.