

OFFICIAL EVENT EDITION

The Winter Gala

the Regional Swimming Association



The Wisdom of Swimming — The Water of Life and the Life of the Water

PRESENTED BY SPORTSMART4LIFE

A word from the organisers



The Winter Gala

A word from the organisers

Dear Sample Reader,

This copy is yours. Your name is on the cover, and it is inside on the pages too, because it was made for you and for nobody else. No two copies of this book are the same.

We wanted to give you something that outlasts a fixture list. Kit wears out. Medals go in a drawer. But everything happens in silence, under the water, where nobody can help you, and that is worth writing down somewhere you will find it again.

What follows are the real voices of this sport — players, coaches and writers, most of them talking about the parts nobody puts on a highlight reel. There is a section on pressure, and what the people who handle it best actually do differently. One on trust, and why a group that trusts each other beats a group that is merely talented. One on losing, which is the section we would ask you to read twice, because everyone in this sport has lost and everyone worth knowing came back. There is a section on joy, which is the reason any of us started. One on mastery, and the unglamorous patience it asks for. One on rivalry, and the respect that runs underneath it. And one on belonging — on being part of something whether or not you are the one on the field.

You do not have to read it in order. Keep it in the kit bag. Open it the night before a hard one. Let it fall open at whichever page finds you, and if a line is worth keeping, keep it.

The game has taught you things already — about nerve, about other people, about getting up. These pages are simply the same lessons in other people's words, gathered in one place so they are there when you need them.

Thank you for everything you give to this. It is noticed, and it matters more than the results ever say.

— The Committee, The Winter Gala

Foreword

Swimming is an honest sport. The water cannot be bluffed and the clock cannot be charmed; between them they strip away everything except what you have actually done. And wherever people swim — school galas, dawn squads, cold open water — the sport teaches the same things: hold your nerve on the block, trust the hand that follows yours, answer the hundredths with habits, protect your joy in the water, log the unseen kilometres, honour the next lane, and be there to be found.

This collection gathers the voices of the water — the swimmers, the coaches, the great watchers and writers who loved it best — arranged around seven themes that belong as much to life as to swimming. Each chapter opens with an image and an idea, then hands the floor to the voices themselves.

Read it the way you would watch a final: sometimes for the race, sometimes for the craft, and sometimes for one quiet glance toward the gallery that you will remember for years.

Ways to Walk with This Book

A collection like this is not meant to be read once and shelved. It is meant to be lived with — kept close, opened often, and put to work. Seven ways to begin:

- **The daily voice**
open anywhere each morning and take one voice with you into the day.
- **The reflection pause**
choose the theme your week is testing, read its essay slowly, and write one honest line of your own in response.
- **Match-day ritual**
before the big broadcast, read the theme the fixture will examine — rivalry before the derby, pressure before the final.
- **The team talk**
captains, coaches, teachers, parents: one voice a week is enough to open a changing room, a classroom or a dinner table.
- **The hard-week medicine**
when life tackles you, the defeat chapter is waiting. It was written for exactly that week.
- **The gift of a voice**
photograph the quote a friend needs today and send it with their name on the message.
- **The long read**
one theme per Sunday evening — a handful of weeks, properly kept.

However you use it, let it stay within reach of wherever you watch.

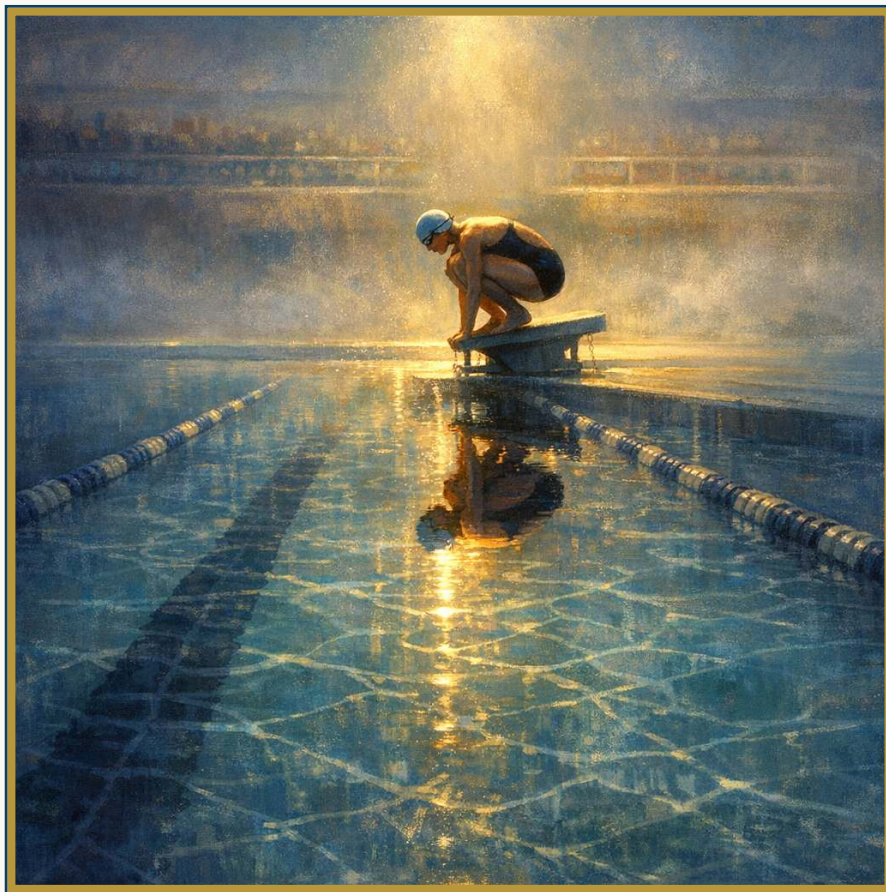
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THEME 1 OF 7

Pressure & Nerve

The block before the start — the loneliest metre in sport, and how the composed cross it.



The loneliest metre in sport is the one between the block and the water — and the dive is the cure.

Pressure & Nerve — in the game, in life

There is no lonelier place in sport than a starting block. The swimmer stands over the water, goggles sealed, cap tight, the whole pool suddenly and terribly quiet — because swimming's ritual of pressure is silence. The command to take your marks, the crouch, and then a stillness so complete you can hear the water lap against the gutters. No teammate stands alongside. No crowd noise will reach below the surface. Whatever happens in the next minutes will be witnessed by everyone and shared with no one. What the great racers teach us from that block is that composure is built in private. The routine that holds them — the same stretch, the same breath, the same slap of the shoulders — was rehearsed through a thousand mornings until it became a place to stand when the nerves arrived. And they teach a second thing, stranger and more useful: that the dive itself is the cure. All the fear lives on the block; almost none of it survives the water. The moment of entry washes the noise away and leaves only the swim — the thing itself, which was never as frightening as the waiting. Life will stand you on the block soon enough: the interview, the diagnosis, the difficult conversation rehearsed in the car. The swimmer's answers hold. Build your routine long before the morning you need it. Let the silence become part of the ceremony instead of the enemy. And remember that dread is a creature of dry land — it cannot follow you in. The longest metre is always the one before the water. Dive, and it is behind you.

“This medal is not just for me but for the African Americans who came before me and inspired me to stay in this sport, and for the people who come behind me who think they can't do it. I hope I'm an inspiration to others to get out there and try swimming.”

— Simone Manuel

Pressure & Nerve

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“Pressure's a privilege and something that I have to use to help me swim fast and use my nerves as well because I know that when I'm nervous and excited it means that the race matters and I'm going to get the best out of myself when I feel that energy.”

— Ariarne Titmus

“I thought of myself as just a swimmer, and not a human being.”

— Michael Phelps

“I didn't hit any of my goal times in Tokyo, and that's not fair to myself.”

— Caeleb Dressel

“It's been an incredibly lonely journey. The devil on my shoulder [says], 'You're missing out on life. You're not good enough. You need a drink.'”

— Adam Peaty

“With the national anthem playing and the flag rising up, the whole electric atmosphere, everyone standing up and the brass band playing, it sent tingles down my spine, and I couldn't do anything else but cry.”

— Shane Gould

“It's just a swim race. You swam the length of a pool. What you did isn't life or death.”

— Rowdy Gaines

“It is right there, at the pain barrier, that the great competitors separate from the rest. Most swimmers back away from the pain; a champion pushes himself on into agony.”

— Don Schollander

“We're lost. I think that's where a lot of it really comes from — we're just so lost because we spent four years grinding for that one moment. And now, we don't know what the hell to do.”

— Michael Phelps

Pressure & Nerve

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“The world got to witness possibly the greatest choke in Olympic history a couple of nights ago.”

— Cate Campbell

“I'm a nervous competitor, but it's the worst nerves I've ever felt.”

— Susie O'Neill

“That was the first taste of that expectation of, 'Oh, you've done it once. He's going to do it again.' I just felt like entertainment at that point.”

— Caeleb Dressel

“We knew that if every swimmer did what they were capable of doing, then we would be close to a world record. We never once spoke about medals. Just focusing on the process took a lot of pressure off us at the time.”

— Ryk Neethling

“It's tens of times, hundreds of times, thousands of times harder than I expected. I haven't been able to eat for more than three days. But I don't want to lose.”

— Rikako Ikee

“I want them to visualize in the most vivid way possible. I want them to smell the chlorine and see themselves swimming exactly the way they want to.”

— Bob Bowman

“I never thought I could not be beat.”

— Trischa Zorn

“The key to his Olympic success is in his personality — the ability to learn and keep a clear mind in any circumstances.”

— Gennadi Touretski

Pressure & Nerve

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

"I know I say I don't want to swim before every event, but this time I'm serious. If I swim six and win six, I'll be a hero. If I swim seven and win six, I'll be a failure."

— Mark Spitz

"Staying silent is easy, but also detrimental."

— Lia Neal

"We have the approach that every race is a sprint. Some races are just longer sprints than others."

— Katie Ledecky

"I didn't want people to feel sorry for me. I still don't want them to feel sorry for me now."

— Simone Manuel

"The impossible is what motivates me every day to go to the pool."

— Katie Ledecky

"Give the best of yourself to each and every moment, because it's your hard work and grace in the daily challenges that prepare you to be unsinkable in the big moments."

— Jessica Long

"Not even my family is aware that I've spent a lot of my life battling what I can only describe as a crippling depression."

— Ian Thorpe

"Once you are at the top of the mountain it is awesome. But staying on top of that mountain is harder than the original climb up the mountain."

— Trischa Zorn

THE WINTER GALA

More from Pressure & Nerve



The moment before it starts.

*“It's OK to not be OK. It's OK to go through ups and downs and emotional rollercoasters.
The biggest thing is, we all need to ask for help when we go through those times.”*

— Michael Phelps

A few more from Pressure & Nerve



Nerve is not the absence of fear.

"We're just products. It's frightening. It's scary. And it breaks my heart. Because there are so many people who care so much about our physical well-being but I never saw caring about our mental well-being."

— Michael Phelps

"Just walking up the stairs to the pool, I was gassed."

— Simone Manuel

"I could just as easily be killed in the pool as outside on the street or at home in my bed."

— Yusra Mardini

THEME 2 OF 7

Teamwork & Trust

Relays and training squads — the individual sport's one shared heartbeat.



One sport, one lane, one time on the board — and one event where four hearts beat as a single swimmer.

Teamwork & Trust — in the game, in life

Swimming looks like the loneliest of sports — one body, one lane, one time on the board — but ask any swimmer where their heart is and they will tell you about the relay. It is the individual sport's one shared heartbeat, and it changes everything. Swimmers speak of finding something in a relay they can never quite find alone: the last length hurts just the same, but the hurt is no longer only yours, and that turns out to matter more than any science of pacing. Watch the changeover closely, because it is trust made visible. The incoming swimmer drives at the wall with nothing left; the outgoing swimmer commits to the dive on faith and fine timing, launching out over a teammate at full stretch. The margin between a perfect changeover and a ruined one is a blink, and it works only because each swimmer has decided, completely, to believe in the other. And behind the relay stands the deeper truth of the sport: the squad. Nobody survives black-line training alone. The brutal morning sets are endured shoulder to shoulder, lane mates dragging each other through the last repetitions, someone always calling the count when your own will has drowned. The times are individual; the getting there never is. So it goes everywhere. Families, wards, classrooms and companies are all relay teams wearing other uniforms: someone finishing exhausted, someone diving in fresh, and everything depending on the honesty of the handover. Swim your leg fully — no one can swim it for you. But remember whose water you dive into, and who dives into yours. Touch the wall having spent everything, trust the next hand completely, and count every good time you ever post as what it truly is: a squad result.

“I got about halfway down and I saw how far ahead Bernard was, and I thought, 'There's no way.' Then I said to myself, 'This is ridiculous, I'm at the Olympics, I'm here for the United States of America. I don't care how bad it hurts, I'm going to give it everything I have.' I just got like a super charge and took it from there.”

— Jason Lezak

Teamwork & Trust

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“When I first started coaching, I only had a hammer so everything looked like a nail.”

— Bob Bowman

“I have three messages: one is we should never, ever give up; two is you are never too old to chase your dreams; and three is it looks like a solitary sport, but it is a team.”

— Diana Nyad

“I believe my success has paved the way for today's Paralympic athletes to receive the opportunities and recognition they are getting.”

— Trischa Zorn

“I can't help it. I bleed with my athletes.”

— Dean Boxall

“I just thanked her. I wouldn't be here without her. She's set this standard for middle-distance freestyle.”

— Ariarne Titmus

“You can't go the distance alone; continue to surround yourself with people who will challenge you, support you and make you laugh.”

— Katie Ledecky

“I just got into the sport because I was having so much fun and I was meeting so many great friends.”

— Katie Ledecky

“The journey will be circuitous. It won't be what you mapped out, but your coach is your GPS.”

— Bob Bowman

Teamwork & Trust

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

"I almost didn't go back when I got back to England. I thought I should just finish and quit, but my team said, 'Guess what? You can do better. You can keep going.'"

— Sarah Thomas

"We had our excuses ready: no money, no sponsors, no coaches with us — the usual South African struggles. We had to put the excuses behind us. We believed that we could achieve a lot more as a team than as individuals. We truly became like brothers."

— Ryk Neethling

"Our object is not to produce a champion but to create an atmosphere where champions are inevitable."

— Forbes Carlile

"To hear that from the guy who won the 100m in the Paralympic Games was really special. I felt emotional, and also a bit old."

— Daniel Dias

"There is no magic at Michigan. I'm not a magician, I'm just a plain coach just like you are, trying to do the best I can."

— Jon Urbanchek

"I don't believe in the philosophy that if you knock a champion down, then they get back up. You have to build them up gradually. You have to develop their self image."

— Eddie Reese

"Mostly because there's someone else in the water that you want to do well, and if I'm going to be beaten I would rather it be someone that I love."

— Bronte Campbell

"If they don't trust you, you can't motivate them."

— David Marsh

Teamwork & Trust

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“They were so excited, because they realized that for the first time in 48 years the border was open, and they were there to witness it and greet us.”

— Lynne Cox

“In Brazil, I became an inspiration to many through the Paralympic Games, so today I really see the impact that the Paralympic Games have on the world.”

— Daniel Dias

“For me the most emotional aspect of the Olympics is being a part of a team and seeing your team-mates do so well, watching my team-mates win gold medals, watching them break world records: it's just so motivating for me.”

— Missy Franklin

“I'm so glad that when I started swimming at bigger meets, I could be that representation for other kids who looked like me.”

— Lia Neal

“Take care of yourself. Take care of each other. That takes care of everything else.”

— Eddie Reese

“Bernard is losing some ground! Here comes Lezak! Unbelievable at the end, the U.S. has done it!”

— Dan Hicks

“I wasn't going for a personal best or anything. I just wanted to get the guys a pretty good lead.”

— Michael Klim

“I'm proud to be the first, but I don't want to be the last.”

— Maritza Correia McClendon

THE WINTER GALA

More from Teamwork & Trust



Nobody does this alone.

“I really enjoy relays. I love both the relays and the individual events because each event presents its own challenges and I try to embrace that challenge.”

— Katie Ledecky

A few more from Teamwork & Trust



Trust, built in the ordinary weeks.

"You'd rather have a good culture than a good immediate result because culture will cause the result to repeat."

— David Marsh

THEME 3 OF 7

Defeat & Bouncing Back

Losses measured in hundredths, answered in habits — the honest arithmetic of the wall.



The clock is the coldest judge in sport — and losses measured in hundredths are answered in mornings.

Defeat & Bouncing Back — in the game, in life

Swimming measures heartbreak more finely than any other sport. Races are lost by hundredths of a second — a fingertip, a breath taken at the wrong moment, a glide held a fraction too long — margins smaller than a heartbeat, delivered by a touchpad that does not negotiate. Years of mornings can be separated from their reward by less time than it takes to blink. And there is nowhere to file a complaint: the clock is the fairest and coldest judge in sport, and every swimmer learns young that it cannot be charmed, blamed or argued with. That severity is the sport's strange gift, because it forces a clean answer to the oldest question: what do you do with a defeat you cannot dispute? Swimmers answer it in habits. The morning after the heartbreak, the alarm still rings in the dark, the bag is still packed, the water is still cold, and the black line is still there, unimpressed. The race is reviewed honestly — the turn that faded, the finish that reached instead of surged — and the flaw goes into the training plan, which is where hundredths are actually found. Grief gets the evening; the pool gets the morning. Losses that arrive in hundredths must be answered in habits, because habits are where hundredths are made. Your own defeats will sometimes come this way — close enough to touch, decided by a margin that feels like mockery. Take the swimmer's path. Let the clock be honest with you, and be honest back. Mourn briefly and fully. Then set the alarm, pack the bag, and go looking for your hundredths where they have always lived: in the quiet, repeated, unwitnessed mornings.

“I used alcohol as a means to rid my head of terrible thoughts, as a way of managing my moods — but I did it behind closed doors, where many depressed people choose to fight their demons before they realise they can't do it without help.”

— Ian Thorpe

Defeat & Bouncing Back

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

"My illness was so severe that, at times, I considered suicide. My blackest periods would often last a month."

— Ian Thorpe

"I wasn't seeing any progress with my performance in the pool. It actually was declining."

— Simone Manuel

"I feel like I've lived two lives."

— Yusra Mardini

"Certainly a tough race. I think we delivered. You can't get much better than that. Tremendous race, a lot of fun."

— Katie Ledecky

"I had so much to be grateful for, yet I was depressed and I felt like speaking about mental health was complaining, so I internalized it."

— Allison Schmitt

"There is a deep sense of shame and regret for those it impacts and my kids are at the front of that line."

— Grant Hackett

"There are times where I feel absolutely worthless, where I completely shut down but have this bubbling anger that is through the roof."

— Michael Phelps

"I'm angry with bronze. I don't get bronze often. I just feel pure anger, which is when I feel very dangerous. This is the fight I need."

— Adam Peaty

Defeat & Bouncing Back

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

"I've never been good at listening to people. They always seem to tell me what I can't do."

— Jessica Long

"I've had at least half a dozen depression spells, and the one in 2014, I didn't want to be alive."

— Michael Phelps

"I just have to pay tribute to Alexander Dale Oen tonight. I know he has been with me this year, I think he helped me finish the race in such a strong manner."

— Cameron van der Burgh

"When I heard the word 'surgery,' I immediately broke down because I already knew my answer: no. I've been in too much pain, for too long."

— Missy Franklin

"I would rather fail because I did everything I could to be successful but fell short, than to fail because I didn't try at all."

— Simone Manuel

"I accept responsibility for my role in this happening and have learned some valuable lessons."

— Ryan Lochte

"I over-exaggerated that story, and if I had never done that we wouldn't be in this mess."

— Ryan Lochte

"I just see failure. I felt like this was my race, home crowd and to come second for me is failure."

— Susie O'Neill

Defeat & Bouncing Back

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

"I knew this was a time that I could save the next person who was struggling, the next person who thinks their life is not worth it."

— Allison Schmitt

"In some respects, it was more like a Hollywood script than any of the swimming performances I did ... before that."

— Kieren Perkins

"Even if you go through suffering and pain, your hard work will always be rewarded."

— Rikako Ikee

"It took me a long time to say the words, 'I am retiring.' A long, long time. But now I'm ready. I'm ready to not be in pain every day."

— Missy Franklin

"I'll go back, I'll swim, I'll get good, and I'll be back on top."

— Yusra Mardini

"I'll soon be walking — and swimming."

— Aleksandr Popov

"I've moved on to other things. I'm not a failure."

— Susie O'Neill

"I came back for the love of it and the love was taken away when the attention came on board."

— Grant Hackett

THE WINTER GALA

More from Defeat & Bouncing Back



The walk back.

“A good 80 percent, maybe more, go through some kind of post-Olympic depression.”

— Michael Phelps

A few more from Defeat & Bouncing Back



And then you come again.

“If she could have seen how many people loved her, how many people cared about her, she would have asked for help.”

— Allison Schmitt

“I didn't want to do anything, wasn't going to school, wasn't swimming. I was pretty much just laying in bed for all hours of the day for a couple months.”

— Caeleb Dressel

“I was able to stay true to who I was as much in failure and disappointment as I had been in winning.”

— Missy Franklin

THEME 4 OF 7

Joy & Love of the Game

The water itself, remembered from childhood — swimming because the water is the point.



Before the stopwatch borrowed the water, the water belonged to joy — and it still does.

Joy & Love of the Game — in the game, in life

Before swimming was ever a sport, it was a delight — and every swimmer, however serious, is secretly in the water for the old reasons. Remember them. The first leap into a summer pool, knees hugged, the world exploding into blue. Salt water at a holiday beach, waves that threw you and let you go. Floating on your back with your ears below the surface, the sky enormous, the noise of the world switched off. Water is the first playground most of us ever had, and the body never forgets it. You can see the memory surface even at the top of the sport. Watch a pool in the minutes after a big race ends: the racing done, someone pushes off underwater and dolphins along the bottom for no reason at all, loose and slow, a child again in a fast suit. Ask open-water swimmers why they slip into cold dawn seas and rivers and they talk less about fitness than about wonder — mist on the surface, the first shock and then the silk of it, the feeling of being small inside something alive. The stopwatch only borrows the water; joy owns it. And there is a rule of life floating here. Discipline is a strong engine and a poor fuel; the energy for your hardest seasons comes from the play you refuse to surrender. Keep your version of the summer pool — swim for no time at all now and then, float until the sky gets big again, do it badly and laughing. The day the water stops being play, you have not become serious. You have only forgotten how you first got in.

“I’ve dreamed about it since I was six years old and I started swimming, and then when I just missed out on qualifying for Sydney. After the motorbike accident it was just a matter of going out there and seeing what I could do, but back then I could never have dreamed this day would come. Definitely not. That was the most perfect swim.”

— Natalie du Toit

Joy & Love of the Game

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“Mine was a complete love affair. It's a beautiful thing, diving into the cool crisp water and then just sort of being able to pull your body through the water and it opening up for you.”

— Dawn Fraser

“I begin to realize that the physical repetition can be a kind of meditation that transcends the simple goal of winning a race.”

— Bonnie Tsui

“My first gold medal, at my first Olympics, is kind of a surprise to me. I never thought I would be in this position, but I'm so blessed and honoured to be on the medal stand.”

— Penny Oleksiak

“Swimming gave me a sort of joy, a sense of well-being so extreme that it became at times a sort of ecstasy.”

— Oliver Sacks

“It is sad but I am happy to end on a high. The last 25 metres was the most pain I have ever had in my life in swimming, so it was a good way to finish.”

— Cameron van der Burgh

“That's been my dream ever since I was a little boy.”

— Chad le Clos

“This is amazing, to tie for a gold. I never thought I'd win a gold. She deserves it as much as me. It means so much.”

— Penny Oleksiak

“I still to this day pinch myself every now and again just to believe it.”

— Kieren Perkins

Joy & Love of the Game

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“Learning to swim meant learning how to relinquish control, to thrive in a space of uncertainty.”

— Bonnie Tsui

“I am sort of in a dream world. Sometimes I have to pinch myself to make sure it is real.”

— Michael Phelps

“When I first dive into the pool I try to work out how the water wants to hold me. If I let it, the water will naturally guide me into a position; a place for my body to settle, resting with my head down, almost meditating.”

— Ian Thorpe

“Unbelievable. I have never been so happy in my life. It's like I've died and went to heaven. Look at him, he's beautiful. What a beautiful boy.”

— Bert le Clos

“It's surreal. It's crazy when you make this massive plan for something. It's probably the biggest thing you could pull off in your sporting career, so I'm over the moon.”

— Arianne Titmus

“It is the biggest thing you can pull off in your sporting career. So I'm over the moon.”

— Arianne Titmus

“There is no anti-depressant quite like sea-swimming. I leave my devils on the waves.”

— Roger Deakin

“It's a miracle that I'm alive, a miracle that I'm here. I never once thought, 'If only I hadn't gotten sick.'”

— Rikako Ikee

Joy & Love of the Game

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

"I got bored, so I swam on my back where I could spend more time looking around."

— Johnny Weissmuller

"I hope there are a lot of champs out there learning how to swim this summer. It's an important life skill... and the best sport!"

— Katie Ledecky

"I don't usually say things like this, but coming here, I wanted to win. I came here for gold. That's what me and my coach worked on. To finish now and I've got, what, four of them? I can't believe it."

— Emma McKeon

"I was at my best when I was my happiest and when I was enjoying, not just the gold medal moments, but truly the everyday process of getting there."

— Missy Franklin

"I'm really just pretty numb. There was a lot of people on the beach to meet me and wish me well and it was really nice of them, but I feel just mostly stunned."

— Sarah Thomas

"The great thing about an aimless swim is that everything about it is concentrated in the here and now."

— Roger Deakin

"Honestly it doesn't seem too real. I came in not expecting to medal and just do my best to make the finals. To come out with two golds, it means the world to me and my family and my teammates."

— Bobby Finke

"I swam as if I had learned to fly. I was free, moving fast, feeling the waves lifting and embracing me, and I couldn't believe how happy I was."

— Lynne Cox

THE WINTER GALA

More from Joy & Love of the Game



Why anyone starts.

“Seawater is so similar in mineral content to human blood plasma that our white blood cells can survive and function in it for some time. I delight in my mental picture of this, the not-so-fanciful notion that we have seawater circulating in our veins.”

— Bonnie Tsui

A few more from Joy & Love of the Game



The part nobody has to be told to love.

“The mind can float free, become spellbound, in a state like a trance. I have never known anything so powerfully, so healthily euphoriant — and I am addicted to it.”

— *Oliver Sacks*

“Being in the water gave me a sense of freedom, playfulness and joy.”

— *Missy Franklin*

“But to my mind, the hard is kind of what makes swimming great. Giving your best effort has been baked into my DNA for generations. Trying hard is the whole point.”

— *Katie Ledecky*

THEME 5 OF 7

Mastery & Practice

Black-line mornings and the feel of the water — the unseen kilometres behind every effortless length.



The crowd sees one perfect minute; the black line saw the years of mornings that bought it.

Mastery & Practice — in the game, in life

Nobody watches a swimmer train. The galleries that fill for finals are empty at five in the morning, when the real sport happens: lap after lap above the black line on the pool floor, the same tumbling turns, the same walls, the world reduced to breath, count and water. Swimmers joke that theirs is a sport with the scenery switched off — and that is precisely why it builds such craftsmen. With nothing to look at, all attention turns inward, to the stroke itself: the catch of the hand, the roll of the hips, the timing of the kick, refined by fractions across seasons until the water begins to cooperate. Coaches call it feel — that uncanny ease the best swimmers have, as if the water had agreed to help them — but feel is not a gift. It is sediment: thousands of unwitnessed kilometres settling into the nervous system, one black-line morning at a time. And the craft is perfectly democratic. The water does not know your name, your school or your reputation; it yields to attention, repetition and honest error, and to nothing else. It never flatters and never lies, which is the mercy of every true craft. Almost everything worth doing in a life obeys the same law — the language, the instrument, the trade, the patient art of keeping your form when you are tired. So choose your craft and find your black line: the early hour, the closed door, the standard nobody demands of you but you. Log the kilometres nobody sees, because they are the only ones that count in the end. And when someone calls you a natural, smile. It is the name people give to work they did not witness.

“It's surreal, kind of absurd. When I touched, turned around and saw the one next to my name, I kind of smiled and laughed. It's been an incredible journey to think that after 16 years I'm back on the podium. But all the credit is to the love and support of my people, my family, my friends, my teammates, my coaches, my country.”

— Anthony Ervin

Mastery & Practice

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“You cannot achieve anything, I believe, unless you bring the right attitude to the pool, to the classroom, to the office—even to the family room.”

— Bob Bowman

“The answer is simple: natural talent multiplied by the ability to work consistently, coming from an understanding that you cannot dive twice into the same water, and the only way to win is non-stop perfection.”

— Gennadi Touretski

“There will be no more staring at the black line at the bottom of the pool for four hours every day.”

— Michael Phelps

“There can be no growth without discontent.”

— Bob Bowman

“Hello, I'm Roland Matthes, I swam backstroke.”

— Roland Matthes

“Dream as big as you can dream, and anything is possible.”

— Michael Phelps

“I never consciously swam for a world record. I consciously swam to win.”

— Mark Spitz

“To thrive in distance swim, you have to train yourself to focus on nothing, or on something constructive. Otherwise, your brain will tell you how much your body hurts. If you can't harness your thoughts, you become your own worst enemy.”

— Katie Ledecky

Mastery & Practice

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“The difference between mediocrity and stardom is only 4 to 5 percent.”

— Mark Spitz

“I felt like I took it to her. I challenged her. I made it a great race and I gave it everything.”

— Ariarne Titmus

“I set goals, but those goals aren't about winning. Winning is inherently about comparison.”

— Katie Ledecky

“I think you get comfortable in deciding to take an uncomfortable decision.”

— Emma McKeon

“It's definitely been the most difficult few months of my life, family wise, the pressure from the Olympic games, it's all come together. But I've also never trained harder than I am now, their sickness has pushed me through.”

— Chad le Clos

“Learn to feel the water. The small goal of just feeling the water is much more important than many other things.”

— Rowdy Gaines

“As others have told me, it is a feat that probably will never be surpassed. I am ok with that. However, records are meant to be broken and I would be excited to meet the individual who would be able to meet that mark.”

— Trischa Zorn

“What can I learn in this situation that will make me better in the future? If you are willing to have that approach and attitude, every single one of your failures will be a blessing.”

— Natalie Coughlin

Mastery & Practice

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“My message would be to not be afraid of the time it will take to achieve your goals. And just to remember that the time is going to pass. So you may as well use that time to work on what you want and those big goals.”

— Emma McKeon

“I was fortunate and blessed to be able to compete at the highest level of competition for seven Paralympic Games and over 34 years.”

— Trischa Zorn

“The water doesn't know how old you are.”

— Dara Torres

“There's so much riding on a moment that comes every four years. It takes everything. It takes an obsession. It takes every bit of you, every ounce of you to just qualify for the Games.”

— Caeleb Dressel

“This is part of the deception of depression and also mental illness: what may appear at face value is a stark difference from the agony that lies within.”

— Ian Thorpe

“Beauty comes from rhythm, and rhythm leads the movement.”

— Gennadi Touretski

“I'm still more at home in the water than I am on land.”

— Rowdy Gaines

“I swam every day and got better with each lap.”

— Janet Evans

THE WINTER GALA

More from Mastery & Practice



The thousandth repetition.

“Eat, sleep and swim. That's all I can do.”

— Michael Phelps

A few more from Mastery & Practice



Hard-won, quietly.

"I'm OK being not OK. I'm OK being who I am."

— Michael Phelps

"So you see why I owe everything to swimming. It not only made my name, it saved my name."

— Johnny Weissmuller

"First of all, I don't see this as a comeback. That would imply that I failed, or that I didn't quite get there. I got there. This is a whole different thing. I just find this a challenge. And based on the reaction from people so far, they're rooting for me. I've become a sort of symbol for couch potatoes everywhere. It's the middle-age syndrome, I guess."

— Mark Spitz

THEME 6 OF 7

Rivalry & Respect

The swimmer in the next lane — the wake that pulls you faster, and the hand across the rope.



For a minute she is the wake you must outswim — and all season she is the reason you got faster.

Rivalry & Respect — in the game, in life

A swimming rivalry is conducted at arm's length, in public, in silence. Your rival lives one lane over — close enough to feel their wake, close enough that a sideways breath shows you exactly where you stand — and for the length of a race the two of you are locked in the most honest conversation in sport, conducted entirely in water and time. Swimmers know a truth about rivals that the rest of us resist: you swim faster next to one. The body finds reserves beside a rival that it cannot find beside a clock. Season after season, rivals drag each other to times neither would have touched alone — trading victories, trading personal bests, each defeat funding the other's next surge of training. The fiercest rivals in this sport are, in practice, collaborators: co-authors of one another's best. And when the race ends, watch what happens at the lane rope. Two exhausted people, chests heaving, reach across the line that separated them — a hand clasped, a tap on the cap, sometimes a laugh, the respect as visible as the effort. Then, in the warm-down pool, they swim easy laps in adjacent lanes, rivals again tomorrow, colleagues in the meantime. Life gives everyone a next lane: the colleague whose work makes ours look ordinary, the peer whose progress needles us at midnight. Use them the swimmer's way. Envy studies a rival's medals; wisdom studies their mornings. Let their wake pull you faster instead of making you bitter. Race them fully — you owe them that much. And when you touch the wall, whatever the order, reach across the rope and mean it.

“I understood from a pretty young age that you can't control what the other swimmers in the race are going to do. So all you can do is set a time goal for yourself and try to reach it. I think that focus has really allowed me, going into the big competitions, to stay focused on my own lane and not get caught up in what other people are doing.”

— Katie Ledecky

Rivalry & Respect

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

"To a naked eye, he won the race. I looked back, and I saw one one-hundredth, and I was like, 'Holy s***, that just happened.'"

— Michael Phelps

"My biased opinion says that we will smash them like guitars."

— Gary Hall Jr.

"You don't have to win the race. You just need to win your race."

— Katie Ledecky

"This is the greatest moment of my life. Phelps is my hero and I love the guy. To beat him, I can't believe it. You don't understand what this means to me."

— Chad le Clos

"Records are always made to be broken no matter what they are. Anybody can do anything that they set their mind to."

— Michael Phelps

"I used to watch what they did and then I would work on my own race and that was the end of it. They were just a name to me, and it wasn't important. I had my lane, I had my black line and I had to get up to the 50m and turn and be home in first place."

— Dawn Fraser

"When I was 12 I looked on Phelps as a hero, as a god almost."

— Chad le Clos

"When I go out and race, I'm not trying to beat opponents, I'm trying to beat what I have done ... to beat myself, basically."

— Ian Thorpe

Rivalry & Respect

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

"I would never let something like a swimming race come between us. It is just a swimming race."

— Cate Campbell

"I think when Gary Hall said they'd smash us like guitars, we stored it in the memory bank."

— Michael Klim

"Sometimes when I go to training in the morning and I get tired or I want to sleep more and I feel I need some boost, I watch it."

— Laszlo Cseh

"I don't even know how to play the guitar. I consider it the best relay race I've ever been part of. I doff my cap to the great Ian Thorpe. He had a better finish than I had."

— Gary Hall Jr.

"It's the Olympics. I race the other guys. I can't control my competitors ... I can't change what they do."

— Ian Thorpe

"There's really no line between able-bodied and disabled swimming. I treat both of them the same. They're your opponents and you've got to race the way you train. It is important to swim your own race and not someone else's."

— Natalie du Toit

"She's made me a better athlete, I totally respect what she has done in this sport, more than anyone else."

— Ariarne Titmus

"In the morning, I wake up thinking of my opponents who are going faster than me and I want to beat them. It's more motivating than trying to fight against yourself. I have this animal in me."

— Florent Manaudou

Rivalry & Respect

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“There are a lot of girls who'd love to beat me. That puts pressure on me. But I just try to stay calm and set goals for myself.”

— Debbie Meyer

“I just want to be better than what I was before. I want to find ways to be faster in the pool. That is my motivation.”

— Sarah Sjöström

“Water polo's a rough game. We never could beat those Yugoslavians.”

— Johnny Weissmuller

“I am the third-fastest swimmer in the world and yet I am the second-fastest swimmer in my family. It is ridiculous. It is not normal.”

— Bronte Campbell

“Very fast.”

— Roland Matthes

“I like challenges, I love life as an athlete, and the atmosphere when you swim and compete with people who are now your friends.”

— Sarah Sjöström

“We become a cohesive Team USA after battling against each other with everything we have.”

— Missy Franklin

“I think the biggest advantage comes with the idea that you have nothing to lose and everything to gain. Nothing was expected of us. We didn't have any expectations to live up to.”

— Roland Schoeman

THE WINTER GALA

More from Rivalry & Respect



Opponents, not enemies.

“You are always racing against the other swimmers, but I always try to just focus on what I'm doing and how I want to swim my races.”

— Katie Ledecky

A few more from Rivalry & Respect



Respect, earned the hard way.

THEME 7 OF 7

Watching & Belonging

Cold galleries, folded towels and a glance up from the water — the quiet fandom of family.



Nobody in the gallery asks for anything at the finish but a glance up from the water — found.

Watching & Belonging — in the game, in life

Swimming's faithful do not fill great stadiums. They sit on hard benches in a viewing gallery above the pool, wrapped against the cold in the strange humid air, peering through steamed glass and chlorine haze, waiting through a five-hour gala for a race that lasts a minute. They are, overwhelmingly, family — and they are the quietest great fandom in sport. Consider what the gallery has already given by the time the race begins. The alarms set in the dark through years of morning training. The cold car-park waits, the flasks, the wet towels ferried home, the weekends surrendered to distant pools. The parent in the gallery has attended a thousand sessions they could not even properly see, and asks for nothing at the finish but a glance up from the water — the swimmer's cap turning toward the benches, an arm raised, found. That glance is the whole transaction of swimming fandom, and it is worth more than a stadium's roar. Not all watching needs noise. Some of the deepest belonging in sport is two people separated by glass and water, each knowing exactly what the other has given. The gallery teaches what the grand arenas sometimes forget: that fandom, at its root, is faithfulness — turning up, in the cold, for years, for someone else's minute. Most of the watching we do in life is gallery watching: the recital, the graduation, the small triumphs of people we love, carried by our unseen ferrying and waiting. Do it the swim-parent's way. Turn up early, bring the towel, expect no announcement of your part. And when your swimmer looks up from the water, be there to be found.

“I look at the athletes that have come before me. I've been so impressed by what they've done, so inspired. But I've never really been into the stats of the medal counts. To be in that kind of company, it's an honour.”

— Emma McKeon

Watching & Belonging

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

"I tried to take the weight of the black community off my shoulders. It's something I carry with me being in this position."

— Simone Manuel

"I think I went outside of my body. I just lost it."

— Dean Boxall

"Nothing brings the world together like the Olympics does."

— Rowdy Gaines

"This medal is not just for me, it's for a lot of people who came before me and inspired me to stay in the sport, and for people who come behind me."

— Simone Manuel

"As soon as I walked out there, it was like a gladiator walking into the Colosseum, hearing the sheer noise of the crowd."

— Ian Thorpe

"Look at him, he's beautiful! I love you!"

— Bert le Clos

"I think it's really important to show people that there's nothing different about us; especially as athletes - we train as hard as the Olympians."

— Ellie Simmonds

"The Olympics are swimming's Super Bowl. Four years is a very long time in a sport where the biological clock is always ticking."

— Rowdy Gaines

Watching & Belonging

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

"I was only 17 years old, and I had the pressure of the nation on my back at that time, and I had another race straight after it, where the Australian team beat the American team in the 4x100 metre freestyle relay."

— Ian Thorpe

"I got to watch Mark Spitz swim in Munich from my living room floor. That was the first time in my life I realized 'I can do this. I can't win seven, but I can go to the Olympics.'"

— John Naber

"It took a long time to find myself and re-establish myself as Kyle Chalmers again, not just this swimmer that everyone's stopping for photos and signatures everywhere."

— Kyle Chalmers

THE WINTER GALA

More from Watching & Belonging



Belonging, in the stands.

“I would like there to be a day where there are more of us and it's not 'Simone, the black swimmer,' because the title 'black swimmer' makes it seem like I'm not supposed to be able to win a gold medal or break records, and that's not true because I work just as hard as anybody else.”

— Simone Manuel

A few more from Watching & Belonging



The people who turn up.

“This win hopefully brings hope and change to some of the issues that are going on. My color just comes with the territory.”

— Simone Manuel

About The Winter Gala

The Winter Gala is a demonstration client, invented to show how a branded edition looks and reads. In a real edition this page carries your own history, your own words, and the details your people would want to keep.

Website: sportsmart4life.co.za

After the final whistle



Until the next one.

Between the Whistles

The final touch is only ever half true. Somewhere water is already moving — a dawn squad diving in, a summer pool filling with children, an open-water swimmer wading into the mist for the pure joy of it. May the voices in this collection walk with you between the lengths of your own life.

SportSmart4Life is the intelligent spectator's toolkit — learn the games you love, watch them smarter, and let the wisdom of sport walk into your life. Explore the sports, SpectatorIQ and the Voices of the Game at sportsmart4life.co.za.

Go Deeper with SportSmart

This collection began as a way of watching. If the voices in these pages made you want to watch with sharper eyes — and let more of the game walk into your life — here is where the journey continues.

- **The Swimming Spectator Module**

eight tools that teach you the game itself — read the play, know the laws, follow the season's plots, and grow your Fan IQ match by match.

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- **SportSmart4Life Membership**

the intelligent spectator's home — modules across 80+ sports, one member dashboard, and wisdom tools that turn watching into wellbeing.

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- **SpectatorIQ — the Quiz Show**

test your sports brain in our quiz show — ladders, live rounds and power-ups across every sport we cover.

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- **Voices of the Game**

the living library behind this book - thousands of verified voices to explore, sport by sport and theme by theme.

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Every quotation in this collection is real, verified and honestly attributed — that is the Voices of the Game promise.