

Experiences of competitive masters swimmers: Desired coaching characteristics and perceived benefits

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The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of competitive masters swimmers by asking them to describe desired coaching characteristics and perceived benefits associated with masters swimming. The research questions guiding this study were: What are masters swimmers' desired coaching characteristics? What are masters swimmers' perceptions regarding the benefits of participating in masters athletics? Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six competitive male masters swimmers aged 49–64 and the qualitative data were analysed using a thematic analysis. According to the athletes, their coaches used effective communication skills to establish positive environments that led to social, health, and performance improvements. In addition, the athletes reported how their coach's kept them focused and motivated prior to competitions when their training became more challenging. Results from this study are of interest to masters swimming athletes and coaches, and could be used to inform the development and design of programs that could optimise the performance and enjoyment of competitive masters swimmers.

Keywords: masters athletes; coaching science; qualitative research; athlete satisfaction

Many ageing adults do not engage in regular physical activity. In fact, almost 60% of people aged 65 and older are physically inactive (Hallal et al., 2012). Lack of motivation and access to facilities, as well as poor health have all been associated with reduced leisure-time physical activity among ageing adults (Cerin, Leslie, Sugiyama, & Owen, 2010). Additionally, researchers have reported that North Americans have negative attitudes towards ageing populations (Baker & Horton, 2011). These findings suggest a need to better understand the experiences of ageing adults who are involved in sport and physical activity. One group of ageing adults, masters athletes, are helping change people's attitudes through a continued investment in sport participation.

Masters athletes are typically over the age of 35 and engage in regular training activities (Young, 2011). Furthermore, they are one of the fastest growing sport cohorts in Westernised countries (Weir, Baker, & Horton, 2011). One sport in particular, masters swimming, has continued to grow in popularity in North America as well as Australia and a number of European nations since its inception in the 1970s. Masters swimming is organised into five-year age groupings (40–44, 45–49, etc.), beginning at 25 years of age. After its first official event in Texas, the United States Swimming organisation was created, followed closely by the first Canadian masters swim club in 1971 (Weir et al., 2011). Today, masters swimmers belong to regional clubs and may choose participation as a competitive venture or simply as a social and recreational activity.

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