



Dryland Training for Youth Swimmers: The GAIN Swim Approach

Our philosophy, and a sample 10-minute session for 10 & under swimmers.

Our Coaches

A Word From Vern Gambetta

"This...I is the culmination of decades of research, planning, coaching, and refinement — an integrated model built on input from some of the best swimming coaches in the world, vetted sports science research, and pedagogically sound workout plans."

— Vern Gambetta, Founder, GAIN

Widely regarded as the founding father of functional sports training and author of eight books, including *Athletic Development*, Vern has coached and consulted across nearly every sport for close to 50 years.



Meet Chris Webb

There's a moment every coach recognises. The swimmer with all the talent in the water — the technique, the engine, the times — who keeps breaking down, plateauing, or losing ground to athletes who shouldn't be beating them. Nine times out of ten, the answer isn't in the pool.

Chris Webb has spent over two decades solving that problem.

Trained in the Gambetta Athletic Improvement Network methodology under Vern Gambetta — widely regarded as the father of modern athletic development — Chris brought a discipline to competitive swimming that the sport had largely ignored: the systematic, science-based development of the complete athlete, from the pool deck out.

The results speak for themselves: nearly a third of the 2024 US Olympic swim team had GAIN Swim in their preparation. All three women on the Paris Olympic 400IM podium. Thirty-four Junior Championship podium finishes across a six-year span. And one swimmer — trained here, in Florida, before she became the most decorated young female swimmer in the history of the sport — is the clearest proof of what this methodology produces at the highest level.

Chris works with three types of clients: elite clubs who want him present, embedded, and accountable for their program's performance; growing programs whose coaches want direct access to his thinking and his eye; and coaches at every level who want the full GAIN Swim methodology at their fingertips, on their own schedule.

If your swimmers are working hard and the results aren't reflecting it, the answer is probably not in the pool.

Our Philosophy

GAIN Swim exists to build a culture of daily physical preparation — developing swimmers who understand the wisdom of their own bodies and can solve movement problems, in the water and out of it.

Mission

To instill a culture of daily physical preparation that develops swimming athletes who understand the wisdom of their bodies and can solve movement problems.

Objective

Physical limitations are eliminated and the swimmer is ready — technically, tactically, physically and psychologically — to compete and win.

Our Guiding Principles

- Dynamic postural alignment and balance are the foundation for all training
- Train movements, not muscles
- Train fundamental movement skills before sport-specific skills
- Train postural (core) strength before extremity strength
- Train body weight before external resistance
- Train joint integrity before joint mobility
- Train strength before strength endurance
- Train power before power endurance
- Train speed before speed endurance

How We Think About Movement

Connect toenails to fingernails, with the core as the centre of the action. Link the shoulder to the hip to more effectively hold water.

Exercise execution is as important as exercise choice — performing exercises badly does little to improve swimming ability, and it increases the risk of injury.

The volume of core work rises rapidly and holds high through the taper. The highest volume of leg work precedes the highest volume of kicking. The highest volume of upper body work precedes the highest volume of swimming.

Everything must be in context: what a swimmer does today follows from the previous session, and links to the next.

Nothing Is Guesswork

Before we write a single rep, we take stock of what a program actually has to work with: the space available — weight room, pool deck, hallway, bleachers; the resources — who's coaching, what equipment exists, what budget there is for more; the time a club is willing to give up, and when; the age and group size of the athletes; and their current fitness and movement literacy — can they squat, lunge, push, pull, brace, bend, and rotate?

We also look at a program's injury history and its coaches' readiness for change. None of this is guesswork. It's assessed, planned, and integrated before training begins.

Why Dryland and Swimming Have to Work Together

It's essential to integrate the dryland and swimming programs so both point toward the same outcome in the water. Synergy is the backbone of the program — dryland training is never allowed to take on a life of its own and compete with what's needed in the pool.

One idea underpins all of it: super-compensation.

When the body is put under physical stress, it tires and performance dips. Given the right recovery — complete rest, a different training modality, or lighter training — energy stores and performance return to baseline. Before the next similar stimulus is applied, the body briefly rebounds above that baseline: it super-compensates. This isn't only a physiological response — it's psychological and technical too.

Time the next stimulus to land inside that window, on land and in the water, and training on land actually transfers to performance in the water.

The Full Program

This is the surface of a program that runs much deeper. The complete GAIN Swim methodology covers Program Assessment & Design, the full arc of Training Phases — Foundation, MAX Strength, Basic Strength, Strength Endurance, Power Endurance, and Hybrid — a structured Exercise Library spanning warm-up, lower body, total body, upper body, and core work, and specific guidance for Age Group Considerations from 8 to 18. It's not a cookie-cutter plan — applied correctly, it's built to produce the kind of results outlined on the previous page.

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[GAIN Swim Substack](#)

What This Looks Like for 10 & Unders

For our youngest swimmers, dryland isn't about strength — it's about movement. In line with our principles, junior work is built around body weight, fundamental movement skills, and postural control, before any of it becomes swim-specific or loaded. Sessions are short, playful, and coach-led, laying the movement foundation that strength and power work will later be built on.

You can see a sample dryland training session on the next page.

Sample Session: 10 & Under, 10-Minute Dryland

You will need skipping ropes and some mats/ soft surfaces for the tuck backs and space to work in. Each round follows a similar progression, but with different variations on the exercises. The childrens' brains and bodies have to work in harmony. It is high on engagement, discovery and fun.

Round 1

Jump rope 25

[Straight arm clapping jacks](#) x 10

[Hip to heel squat](#) x 5

[Chest touch push up](#) x 5

[Forward lunge knee touch](#) x 2 L/R

[Sit up and reach to sky](#) x 8

[Rocking in tuck](#) x 5

Round 2

Jump rope 25

[Straight arm clapping jills](#) x 10

[Hip to heel squat w/ 180 pivot](#) x 5

[Chest touch push up spiders](#) x 5

[Rev knee touch lunge](#) x 2 L/R

[Tuck and extension](#) x 8

[Rock back toe touches](#) x 5

Round 3

Jump rope 25

[Skipping foot grab and reach to sky](#)

[Hip to heel squat w/ 360 pivot](#) x 5

[Chest touch push up frogs](#) x 5

[Forward lunge to rev lunge](#) x 2 L/R

[Slow bicycle](#) x 8

[Rock back to frog](#) x 5