

The Skill of Sculling by Terry Schroeder, Head Coach, Men's National Team

Another important skill that all players in our sport need to become expert at is sculling. **For many young athletes this is a difficult skill to learn.** In this skill the athlete must learn how to use his arms and legs in a less traditional method. Sculling requires the athlete to use his arms to push water - driving the body backwards while laying feet first in the water and the legs are moving in a bicycling motion – grabbing water and helping to pull the body backwards.

The correct body position for this skill is to be laying (stomach down) slightly on your side in the water. Your body will be turned approximately 35 - 45 degrees in the water. You are in a feet first position (meaning that your feet are out in front of you and you are going to be traveling in the water with your feet first). One leg is lower in the water and one leg is up close to the surface of the water. **As stated above the legs are moving in a bicycling motion and the athlete is trying to “grab” the water with the feet and legs in order to help pull the water moving the body backwards in the water (feet first).** The arms/hands are also working to help propel the body backwards over the legs. The arms are moving in an “egg beater” type motion and trying to push water with each stroke of each arm/hand. As the arms do this “egg beater” type motion the hands are catching water and almost throwing water out in front of you to help propel you forward over your feet.

The best way to practice this skill by getting his/her body in this laid out position in the water and attempting to move as streamlined through the water as possible. I would recommend breaking this skill down and practice by focusing on your legs first and then come back and focus on your arms/hands. First, get yourself into the proper sculling body position, and try to propel yourself as fast and as streamlined as you can through the water with the focus on your legs only. The arms can be moving but only in a support mode. Do this exercise over both your left hip (left leg lower in the water) and over your right hip (right leg lower in the water). After you are feeling good about your legs now go back and focus on your arms and hands. Once again, your legs can move in a support mode in this exercise. **Try to move as fast and as streamlined through the water with the focus on your upper body movements.** Really try to scoop and throw the water with your arms and hands to help propel your body backwards in the water.

One other exercise to practice sculling with the focus on the arms/hands is to hook your feet into the gutter of the pool while laying face down in the water. Now try using only your arms/hands in a sculling motion to lift your upper body out of the water by scooping and throwing the water down. You can do this exercise for 15 seconds on/15 seconds off. It is pretty intense work on your arms if you really try to push your upper body out of the water.

Once you are feeling like you have your arms and legs working together in this sculling motion continue to practice it and you will become more and more efficient in moving backwards in the water. **It is imperative that you learn how to be proficient at this**

skill over both hips. Most athletes feel more comfortable sculling over one hip. Once you feel good about how you are moving over your strong side then try to switch and practice sculling with the other hip/leg down. In a game you will need to be able to scull backwards over each side.

Sculling backwards is used primarily for moving backwards in the water when you are guarding a driver/attacker who is moving at you in the water. It is important in this driver defense mode that you are able to move backwards in the water without swimming (at least initially).

This is a fundamental skill that you can practice by yourself. **The best way to practice this skill is simply to do it.** Lay in the water (face down) with your feet out in front of you and begin sculling and move across the pool with your left leg lower for one lap and then your right leg lower on the next lap. After you are feeling pretty comfortable then add a switch over your hips every 4 - 5 meters. When you switch over your hips try to resume the sculling motion right away so you never lose your power in the water.

After you feel you have the basics down and you want to challenge yourself a little more, you can put a driver/attacker in the water with you and have them swim at you to one side or the other. If the driver swims (drives) to your right then you will lay out in the water with your left leg down and the right leg up at the surface and scull backwards while the driver moves at you. See how long that you can stay up with the driver with your sculling skill only. Then have the driver/attacker swim to your left and drop your right leg down and left leg up while you scull backwards and attempt to keep up with the driver for as long as you can. For now, don't worry about the driver being able to swim faster than you can scull. For the time being just try to keep up with the driver for as long as you can.

To become a more advanced water polo player one must be very good at sculling backwards in the water. Sculling by itself is critical to learn and apply in the water especially as you defend against a driver moving at you. Next month we will build on this skill. Sculling backwards is used in all the jumping skills. Next month I will explain how the sculling skill is really the precursor to all the jumping skills.

On a side note, the Men's National Team has began training full time for the Beijing Olympics and all of these basic skills that I am discussing and explaining on this web page are a integral part of are training drills. If you get a chance come by and observe one of our practices or better yet come out and watch one of our games to see these skills in action.