

Adaptability key to B-TRAiN Swimming's return to the pool

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Being adaptable is crucial in sport. Sport teaches versatility and perseverance through adversity. For Ottawa's B-TRAiN Swimming, these characteristics are the foundation to its success during the Covid-19 pandemic. Success, however, can be subjective.

"I would say that success is finding a way to carry on. That's what this is right now," said Andrea Smith, the head coach and founder of B-TRAiN. "I have a very different definition of success for a pandemic and that would be finding a way to carry on."

Smith, a former Olympian, founded B-TRAiN in 2003 to meet the demand for more adult-oriented swimming clubs in Ottawa. Since then, she has grown the club to more than 100 members and made it her full-time job – all put on hold because of the pandemic in March.

While Smith initially had to close her business, B-TRAiN, like other swimming clubs around the world, hasn't had a single case of transmission since it reopened in July. The [lack of transmission in pools](#) is likely due, in part, to the levels of chlorine in the water but can also be attributed to thorough planning.

"The return to sport came with protocols we could not have even imagined," said Smith, who filmed video after video for her members, explaining the new rules in and around the pool. "Swimming is so different now."

B-TRAiN's in-pool capacity has dropped from 45 swimmers to 18. Smith has increased sessions from five to nine per week and split them in half to allow everyone who wants to swim the opportunity to do so. The pool is divided into three groups of six who swim up one lane and down the one beside it. There are home bases on each side of the pool that allow two swimmers to enter the pool at the same time, while staying apart in the water. The following swimmers enter the water with five seconds of separation between them.

Creating a lane of six equally skilled 20-to-70-year-old athletes swimming in rotation is virtually impossible. While this can be frustrating for the faster swimmers, Smith said everyone has, for the most part, been patient and even encouraging. So many swimmers were eager to adapt to preserve their one session a week that she consistently found her monthly class sign-up sheets filling within minutes.

“Their one swim a week where they would normally have three is their one place where the world has felt normal for 40 minutes. That has kept me going,” she said. “This is necessary.”

For almost a year now, the pandemic has filled many lives with anxiety and uncertainty. When Smith reached out to her members in May with a survey gauging interest in a safe return to the pool, she was met with overwhelming support and it hasn't faded.

“It took so much work on my part and it took so much work on my swimmers' parts,” said Smith, who had worked 169 consecutive days before lockdown. “Everyone had to buy into these procedures and work as a team.”

Since reopening in July, B-TRAiN and its members have successfully returned to sport with no Covid-19 transmission by collectively following and exceeding strict protocols. When sport returns for a second time after the current lockdown ends, Smith said she will be ready to resume these critical efforts.

“This is where adaptability is key. Everything is different. If you can't be adaptable and you can't learn, it's not going to work,” she said.

“It's not easy. I have my bad days. It kills me to not be in the pool – my gills are drying out,” she joked. “But right now, we just have to be tough for a little longer.”