

# CHANNEL SWIM CHALLENGES: ADAPTING TO THE NEW NORMAL

Sport psychologist **Helen Davis** finds out how The King's Swimmers are adapting English Channel training to maintain motivation in uncertain times

**“S**wimming the Channel or doing any endurance swim is 50% in your head” claims Kevin Murphy, joint founder of The King's Swimmers. “You go way, way beyond your physical capability, it comes down to determination and willpower.”

As Coronavirus took hold, The King's Swimmers had to cancel training camps and the physical and psychological impact of lockdown has been a challenge on their swimmers with little or no time in water. The King's Swimmers have had to draw upon their own reserves of determination and willpower to adapt to the current situation amidst uncertainty to keep their swimmers motivated, prepared and ready to realise their swimming dreams.

## DETERMINATION AND WILLPOWER

The King's Swimmers are team of some of the world's greatest open water swimmers providing teaching, advice and support to swimmers from all over the world to prepare for Channel and endurance swims. Kevin Murphy, Kathy Batts and Ian Muir form the backbone of The King's Swimmers and collectively have an impressive open water swimming CV. Their love of long-distance swimming is evident in their collective desire to inspire, coach and lead by example a new generation of long-distance swimmers.



## Three interesting facts about The King's Swimmers

- Kevin Murphy has swum the English Channel 34 times – including 3 doubles!
- Kathy Batts has swum the Channel solo, 18 Channel relays, Catalina Channel, Manhattan Island, Lake Tahoe and Loch Lomond
- Ian Muir has swum the Channel three times including two swims of under 10 hours



The end of  
a swim at a  
training camp in  
Menorca



Helen says...

#### CHANNEL SWIM CHALLENGES

Many King's Swimmers have Channel swims booked for July, August and September, organised months ago with money paid, their training plans were in full swing before lockdown. For these swimmers it has been a particularly challenging time knowing their swims could happen but not being able to train.

The lifting of restrictions on the use of private boats and the introduction of a 'travel corridor' between England and France saw Channel swimming resume from 10 July. As the rules have changed suddenly Channel swims may now just be a phone call away with little warning. Support crews will likely be affected for individuals and relays with limited numbers allowed on boats to adapt to social distancing guidelines. All these alterations and uncertainties present psychological challenges to the swimmers.

#### BEING ADAPTABLE

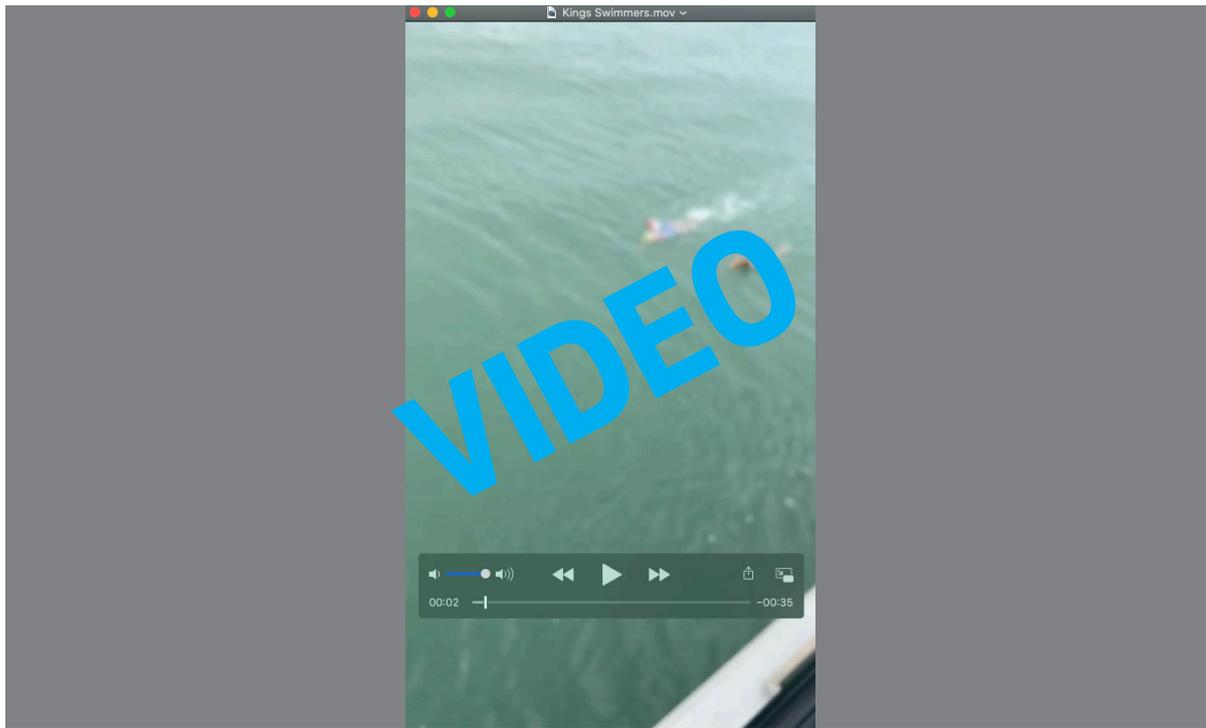
"Lack of preparation has worried swimmers enormously" says Kevin. Since restrictions eased swimmers have been faced with the reality of their situation and The King's Swimmers have had to help swimmers make some

difficult decisions – to postpone or get prepared.

The team have been determined to support their swimmers and have set up a 'one size doesn't fit all' swim training camp currently taking place in Dover harbour. Seven days a week they are offering individual coaching and training programmes tailored to what each swimmer needs as they contemplate swims which might be just days or weeks away while maintaining safety and social distancing. Now the green light has been given for Channel swimming to resume, the swimmers want to be ready and The King's Swimmers want to help them do that by keeping motivation high and support readily accessible.

Maintaining motivation amidst uncertainty is difficult. For many loss of goals and events has been and continues to be a challenge. There are three key ingredients (3C's) for good quality motivation:





**Synchronised long distance swimming**

← **COMPETENCE**  
**CONTROL**  
**CONNECTEDNESS**

All 3C's could easily have been compromised during this difficult period. For Channel swimmers, a

sense of competence to complete the swim could be affected by lack of training. A sense of control might have been lost as decisions on giving the green light for swims to take place is outside of their control. A sense of connectedness to the Channel

swimming community might have been lost or been difficult to maintain during lockdown.

Being adaptable and having psychological flexibility can help to manage and deal with the current situation facing these swimmers. By introducing the Dover Swim camps, The King's Swimmers are helping to foster competence in their swimmers. Despite swimmers facing self-doubt, Kevin recounts "how the penny drops" when swimmers exit the water having successfully completed a 6 or 7-hour swim with a beaming smile. "They know they can do it".

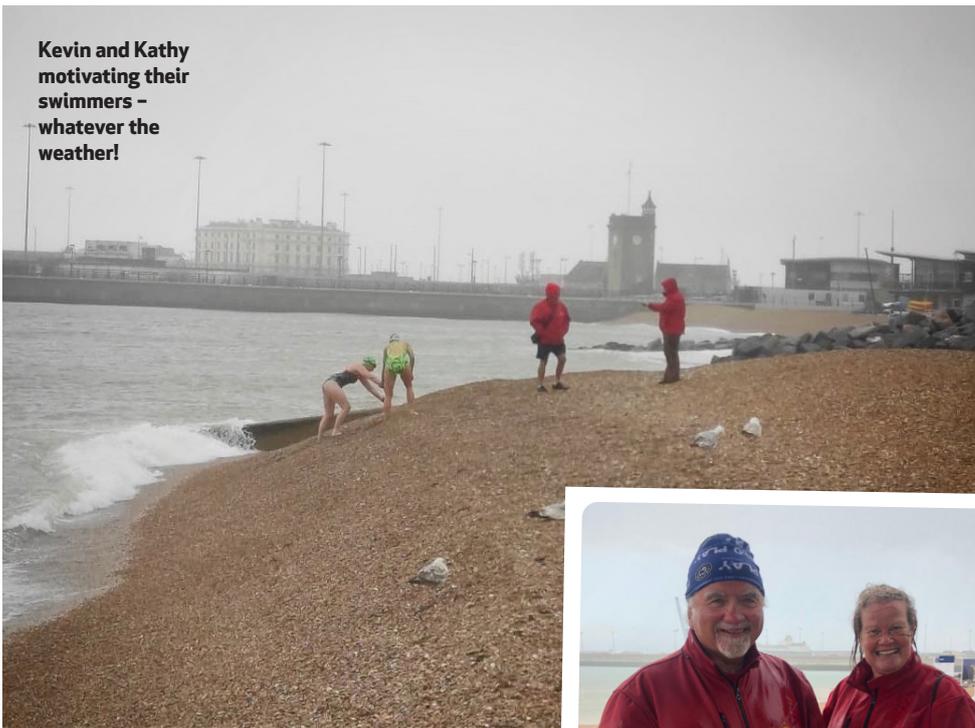
Being able to attend training camps can bring more of a sense of control to a swimmer's situation – they are

The team have worked hard to help prepare swimmers the best they can given the circumstances they find themselves in. No matter what those circumstances are at the moment, they are determined to stick by their motto: 'Swim the dream, we can help you...'

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**Kevin and Kathy motivating their swimmers – whatever the weather!**



able to make their way to Dover and they are able to train. Indeed, some swimmers are showing true determination by taking control and driving for hours from their homes, sleeping in cars for a few nights while completing lengthy swims during the days before returning home. This is true determination and will power.

Keeping connected through the newly formed Dover camps and feeling an identity with The King's Swimmers will also be helping them to manage their situation through support received. "Swimmers say I have 'a look'" says Kevin. "They don't want to let me down – they never do of course" he says, "but I'm happy to embrace 'my look' if it works for the swimmers!"

#### MOTIVATE TO INSPIRE

The King's Swimmers say their role

is to motivate to inspire and the team recognise that when they see swimmers go beyond their limits, it inspires them too. With camps already planned in Menorca for 2021 the team have worked hard to help prepare swimmers the best they can given the circumstances they find themselves in. No matter what those circumstances are at the moment, they are determined to stick by their motto: 'Swim the dream, we can help you...'

#### A FINAL SAY...

We wish all Channel swimmers the best from Outdoor Swimmer and hope you get to achieve your dreams 🏊‍♂️

Helen Davis is a swimmer and Chartered Sport Psychologist who works with individuals, teams and coaches on their sporting performance. Each month, Helen profiles a swimmer and suggests psychological techniques to help them. [thinkbelieveperform.co.uk](http://thinkbelieveperform.co.uk)  
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# Tips on Motivation

Recognise that we are in a challenging time and it is inevitable that motivation will fluctuate. Be kind to yourself – it's unrealistic to be motivated every day but take time to consider your motivation and how you can fuel your 3Cs.

## COMPETENCE

- Set yourself process goals as part of your daily structure
- Log goals and review on a daily or weekly basis
- Consider redefining mastery goals
- Use a reflective diary to help you reflect on where you are at, possibly re-evaluate, review, revise and record your efforts

## CONTROL

- Focus on what is in your control and know what isn't in your control
- Use your natural strengths by tapping into them to help you maintain motivation and make you feel good
- Look at what you can have influence over and make a plan to action
- Take control by learning about your motivation, provide yourself with challenges and recognise achievements

## CONNECTEDNESS

- Keep contact with those who give you the greatest level of support
- Feel part of something bigger than just you – keep in touch with groups, teams, social circles, family, friends, organisations, committees
- Have a motivation buddy for sharing goals, keeping on track and support