



## To Swim Faster Breaststroke, Don't Pull Harder

By Russell Mark // USA Swimming High Performance Consultant

The best breaststroke is about using your body to drive/surge forward with each stroke, and having a pull that allows your body to do that. The pull is an integral part of the stroke, but it is not the primary driving force of propulsion in breaststroke. Pulling harder or trying to pull more water can actually be counterproductive. The breaststroke arm pull doesn't determine breaststroke speed. If it did, the best breaststrokers would be pulling faster or pulling further back when swimming faster.

We looked at the technique of Brendan Hansen, Kosuke Kitajima, Leisel Jones and Rebecca Soni. These four breaststrokers are unique in that they are equally successful in the 100m and 200m event. **The speed and technique of the pull remained exactly the same, regardless of swimming at a faster speed (100m) or slower speed (200m).** From the start of the pull to the finish, the 100m and 200m videos remained in total sync. The differences were:

1. The kick was quicker in the faster speed. Faster heel speed to set up the kick. The start of the kick remained the same, but the heels were brought up faster and then the backward kick started sooner.
2. Less glide in the faster speed. Less time in between strokes.





## **To Swim Faster Breaststroke, Don't Pull Harder**

**By Russell Mark // USA Swimming High Performance Consultant**

Nonetheless, the pull is critically important for setting up the entire stroke. Here is what's important about the breaststroke pull:

1. Start the pull by sculling outward, with the palms facing the side of the pool. It's not like freestyle, backstroke, or butterfly where you want to catch a lot of water in the first part of the pull. The outward scull holds a good body position and sets up the rest of the stroke to be the best possible.
2. The arms never push water directly backward. After the scull, the hands should make the shape of an upside-down heart – rounded on the outside and then coming together as they extend forward. (See illustration, above).
3. The further back your hands go, the harder it is to shoot them forward. It's ok if your elbows come next to your body, but keep your hands in front of your chest. You won't feel like you're pulling as much water as you can, but your stroke will be better in the end because you can shoot your hands and body forward better.
4. Bring your hands together as they extend forward. Use your elbows to push your hands forward, but don't squeeze your elbows together. At the same time, press your chest and face forward to get your body driving forward.

One final note: All of the best 100 breaststrokers increase their tempo as they swim the final length. They are able to do this because they are able to shoot their body and their hands forward very effectively. That's what you should be focused on as well.