THE ROLE OF DELIBERATE PRACTICE IN SWIMMING
Revesz Laszlo, Bognar Jozsef, Geczi Gabor, Bicsery Gabriella
(Semmelweis University, Hungary)

Introduction
Sport researchers have been long interested in identifying the specific factors that are responsible for exceptional performance. The Theory of Deliberate Practice (Ericsson, et al, 1993) has the notion that engagement in specific forms of high level practice is necessary for the attainment of high expertise. This theory sees giftedness not directly contributing to expertise. There is no consensus regarding then specific extent and length of practice that is required to attain peak performance. The theory advocates the 10-year rule in gymnastics, running, wrestling, figure skating and tennis. Contrary, in ultra endurance triathlon and martial arts less than 10 years practice was found to reach expert level. This study focuses on the theory of deliberate practice as applicable to swimming.

Methodology
Tamás Széchy and his team was selected for this study. Participants in this study were 10 male swimmers and all of them were members of the Hungarian National Swimming team achieving a number of medals at World- and European Championships and Olympic Games. Széchy has been considered the most successful swimming trainer in Hungary and one of the most successful coach in the world. Each of his swimmers was interviewed three times for 1-2 hours. Questions included biographical information, specifics for selection, background for choosing swimming, learning, practice, and competition. Participants were also asked to estimate how many hours per day/week they had trained so we could compare our data with the deliberate practice theory. Qualitative data were analyzed, compared and were put into themes.

Results
The majority began swimming under the guidance of Széchy at an early age (5-6). In Széchy’s theory, the perfect swimming technique is the key element to achieve and the fundamental basis for daily practice and high level performance. Potential and also the promising technique what he looked for in the first place when selecting his athletes. In Széchy’s theory, the intensity and level of training, the choice of distance and type of style were decided later on in the training process. All participants agreed that the achievement of national level was 2-3 years and the international level was 5. The role of high intensity training was highly emphasized, generally the practice hours were about 6 hours a day. The practice hours, intensity and the specifics of the work were decided solely by the coach and it was grounded on parental agreement and mutual trust.

Conclusion
In this study the original theory of deliberate practice was not supported. The points of view of the swimmers were that the success consists of many different components: the personality and leadership of coach, the relation with the fellow swimmers, family background, and the equipment and training place as well.

References

Keywords: Swimming