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## Editorial: Born to Swim?

Stephen J. Langendorfer Ph.D.

*Bowling Green State University - Emeritus Professor, Developmental Aquatic Kinesiology, slangen@bgsu.edu*

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As some readers may be aware, I am an extremely proud grandfather of two grandsons born two and one-half years apart. The oldest who I call “my favorite oldest grandson” (that’s a “grandpa joke,” in case you wondered...) lives in Chicago and has been the recipient of several sessions of formal swim lessons as well as informal “Grandpa swim lessons.” The youngest grandson, only a little over five months old as of this writing (and, of course, I call him “my favorite youngest grandson”) lives in Indiana and has unfortunately not received any swim lessons so far (the one planned lesson was snowed out recently).

On the occasion of the birth of this youngest grandson, one of *IJARE*’s frequent authors asked me whether the newborn was going to be a front crawl swimmer (“like his Grandad”) or a breaststroke swimmer. I had to admit to my colleague that the only way I knew to identify the difference in stroke preference was to take the youngster in the water and watch whether he alternately pedaled his feet or simultaneously kicked. Neither my son nor daughter-in-law were about to let me plop their newborn in any large basin of water, especially before the umbilicus had healed, to see for myself.

So, I asked my colleague how I could tell stroke preference at such a young age (i.e., 1-2 days old) without putting him the water. I was informed that if the baby held the legs and feet straight or turned slightly inward, they would be a front crawl swimmer while if he held his feet and ankles turned slightly outward, the young man was destined to prefer the breaststroke. To answer this prognosis, I took a photograph (photo 1) and emailed it to my colleague for analysis. My colleague (also a grandparent, I should mention) confirmed what I suspected: another front crawl swimmer had been born (since the feet were mainly turned inward)!

The answer to whether the prediction about my grandson’s swim stroke is accurate or not will take a few more years to answer. The basic question is whether early foot static positioning predicts future kick (and therefore swim stroke) preference. I should note that I am quite confident that my own preferred method of observing a young child in the water kicking has at least one case backing up my claim. About 16 years ago I worked with a 3-month-old baby (I even have video!). I noted the baby’s preference for using simultaneous kicking actions in the water. I told his parents at the time that I predicted he would be a breaststroke swimmer. Last year, the same young man, now a high schooler, took first place in the State High School Swimming Championships. And, of course, his success was in the 100-yard breaststroke event! So far, I can claim that my method is accurate 1 for 1! We will have to wait another few years to see whether the foot position prediction works as well.



**Photo 1.** Grandson's newborn foot position predicting preference for front crawl swimming

Of course, there may be some extenuating circumstances that could complicate testing the prediction. For example, when I proudly proclaimed to my son that his newborn was destined to be a front crawl swimmer, I was curtly informed, "Dad, he is going to be a soccer player!" It appears that Grandpa may have his work cut out for himself to provide swim lessons so that swimming might still be an option for this grandson!