*Publication here:* [*https://swimswam.com/shouts-from-the-stands-the-feel-of-the-50m-breaststroke/*](https://swimswam.com/shouts-from-the-stands-the-feel-of-the-50m-breaststroke/)

**The Feel of the 50 Meter Breaststroke**

I sprung from the popcorn rough cement of the starting block. My head broke through the slow viscous shock of the cold pool. My arms pulled it back and down.

The startle of the start gun still popped in my ears. In my mind’s stereo, Jon Bon Jovi’s “It’s My Life” tuned up to play in a singular loop. Coach Kim’s voice warned, “if you look over, you’ll lose time!”

I wanted to crane my neck but couldn’t afford the milliseconds. I knew she was faster than me. Instead, I felt for the force of the better swimmer’s wake. Was it dragging me forward? Was I pushing against it? It was steady. The ripping velocity was right by my side.

As my head turtled out of the shell of the water, I heard whistling and shouting. Loud. The cacophony was an IV trigger pushing a line of adrenaline into my veins.

My auditory senses bobbed back into a silent density. A frothy gurgle muted the cheers. I struggled to push against the slippery thick. My legs frogged outward and snapped back in.

I reached the turn and touched the wall with force. Coach Kim shouted the steps, “shove your brother, call your mother!” Commanded, my arms led my body through a pivot. My legs bent to push, hard.

Gliding out of the turn, I waited for the water to slow me, then I moved it away.

Ears and eyes rose up again. The black line on the lane’s cement bottom fell out of focus, then back into clarity. My goggles fogged.

Was my opponent still next to me? Did I lose her at the turn?

I willed myself forward. Up and down. Changing noise was in sync with every switch between air and fluid. Wild sound, less sound.

A tight blink of my eyes warned off the cloying persuasions of fatigue.

The spectators’ heads completed a synchronized turn. I slammed into the end with the open palms of both hands.

The stopwatch quit counting speed. The timer lowered his arm. The race was over. My breathing was no longer measured gulps. I panted in exhaustion as I unclenched the wall with one hand, and my body dropped to the left. Finally, I could look without losing time.

I saw her. She was just touching the wall. I’d won.