

High-tech swimsuits are 'bad news', expert says

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Joel Stager

Joel Stager, director of the Counsilman Center for the Science of Swimming at Indiana University, says it's about time elite swimmers come around to the idea that high-tech swimsuits are bad news.

"There's an overwhelming dissatisfaction by the [swimming](#) community that this is turning into an escalating technology war," he said. "Finally, the athletes are getting it into their heads that their efforts are being devalued. It's not about who wins or loses, but what suit they're wearing. It's disappointing."

Stager, longtime swim coach and competitive swimmer, refused to watch the World Championships this week, during which athletes crushed

numerous world records and swimming phenom Michael Phelps lost his first major race in four years.

"It's a carnival. It's a joke," Stager said. "I'd like to be able to believe that we've come up with a new protocol for training and preparing our athletes, or we've found some nutritional secret, but that's not the case."

High-tech swimsuits have been credited with a surprising rash of records in 2008-2009. Prior to that time, Stager's research found no bias -- or anything unusual from a historical and statistical perspective -- about swim times at major meets, such as the Olympics.

Stager says the swimming community (around 600,000 competitive swimmers nationwide) has not benefited financially from the new technology, yet it represents a sizable market for the suits, which can cost \$280 to almost \$580. He said competitive swimmers typically purchase one swimsuit for the season and then a second one for championships. A championship round of suits could cost a high school swimming program around \$20,000, which is how much Stager estimates all swimmers combined had spent at Indiana state championships prior to these new costly suits. Now, he estimates Indiana swimmers will spend a combined \$100,000 on swimsuits for the state meet. College swimming programs have felt the pinch, too.

"Last year, a lot of college coaches had to call parents up and ask for help purchasing swim suits," Stager said. "That's the only way they can do it. Given all the other costs of going to college, it's ridiculous."

FINA, the international governing body for swimming, has rules that prohibit performance- or buoyancy-enhancing gear. The body decided in June to allow some of the suits. However, in the last week, FINA has changed course, deciding to ban many of the high-tech suits beginning sometime next year, requiring swim suits to be made of textile fabric,

not rubberized material, and reducing the coverage allowed by the suits -- no longer allowing full-body coverage.

Stager said the ban is worthwhile but should begin as soon as possible because of the confusion surrounding which swimming records were obtained by athletes wearing controversial swimsuits.

"There is absolutely no rationale for allowing these suits to be used beyond yesterday," he said. "We don't need anymore asterisks on the record books."

Provided by Indiana University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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