



Swim Meets 101

Meets are a great chance for swimmers to have fun, hang out with friends, and measure progress, as well as for coaches to evaluate both individuals and the group, identifying strengths and weaknesses that may not be immediately apparent during practice. Our focus is on technique and performance relative to the swimmer's previous personal bests – both time and technique – not overall placing. We do not require attendance at meets, but expect that every swimmer will try to attend at least two meets over the course of the season – and we encourage everyone to compete as often as they can. Swimmers who compete regularly tend to be more engaged in practice and stay in the sport longer.

We register for swim meets about a month in advance by sending out an email with the details of the meet and what the registration deadline is; all parents need to do is fill out the form linked in the email, which will also be posted on our website. Meets are generally Saturday and Sunday, with occasional Fridays which are usually longer distance events only. It is normal for new families to choose one day or the other, though we encourage doing both days, especially for more experienced swimmers. (See Parent Handbook for details on fees.) Once the deadline has passed we cannot take new registrations and existing ones will be charged, even if a swimmer does not attend.

Once swimmers are registered, the coaches will decide what events they will swim. Sometimes we will enter swimmers in events that are not their favorites or even where we know they will be disqualified as their technique may not yet be correct. We do this to create well-rounded swimmers who are motivated to continue to improve in all strokes, as research has shown that swimmers who specialize before their mid-to-late teens have poorer performances overall than those who swim a wide variety of events.

Swimmers should pack:

- ✓ swimsuit (one-piece for girls, jammers for boys; no external ties or metal/plastic parts)
- ✓ two pairs of properly-fitting goggles (goggles that leak or fall off lead to poor starts, slow races, and frustrated swimmers)
- ✓ Stingrays swim cap (even if they don't wear one at practice)
- ✓ at least two towels
- ✓ a Sharpie marker
- ✓ warm clothes (bathrobe/fleece/coat/etc) to wear between races
- ✓ healthy snacks and water
- ✓ books, games, etc to keep entertained between races
- ✓ camp chairs for both spectators and swimmers (don't count on a bleacher seat)

Spectators should come prepared for a lot of downtime and for an indoor venue to be uncomfortably warm even when it is cold outside. USA Swimming rules prohibit parents from the competition pool deck unless they are volunteering, but there are always



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spectator seating areas; swimmers can usually sit with their parents once they have dried off after each race, or they can sit with teammates on the deck.

Swimmers should arrive at the pool in time to be ready to get in the water when warm-ups start. The time varies, but will be emailed to everyone in the week prior to the meet. Swimmers who are later may miss their opportunity to warm up and get used to the new pool and starting blocks. Swimmers can come in their suits and or change at the pool (all the pools where we compete have access to locker rooms for athletes only; in no case should a swimmer ever change on deck, even behind towels or under other clothes).

We warm up by swimming a short workout and then practicing a few starts. Warm-ups last about an hour, but depending on how busy the pool is we may start late or finish early. When swimmers arrive they should be able to spot their coach on the deck; they can come over once they are ready so we can get everyone into the water on time.

Heat sheets will be for posted at the meet and/or provided online and tell the order of races, the swimmers in each, and sometimes about when each event should start (times should be considered very rough estimates only). We suggest downloading the app "Meet Mobile" to have access to heat sheets for most (though not all) of the meets we attend. Parents should use a Sharpie to write swimmers' races, heats, and lanes on their arms. (See the next page for examples.) Coaches can help with this the first time, but time constraints mean we need parents or swimmers to do it themselves after that.

Our 8 & under swimmers will usually go to a bullpen before the start of each race, and meet volunteers will make sure they get to their race after that. If swimmers are sitting with their parents, they should keep track of where the meet is and make sure they get to their races with time to spare. (Bear in mind the length of races varies: a heat of the 500 free may take 7 minutes, whereas a heat of the 50 free will take under a minute.) Coaches will try to walk the first-time swimmers over to the starting blocks for their races and help them with the starting sequence. As swimmers gain experience, getting themselves to the right place at the right time – and sometimes experiencing the consequence of missing a race if they do not – is one of the many life skills taught by competitive swimming.

Meet sessions are split up by age (usually with younger swimmers in the morning and older in the afternoon) and generally last about four hours. During that time, each swimmer will have three or four races. Swim meets at first will seem very chaotic, loud, and confusing! The good news is that the chaos and confusion diminish with experience. There will be other Stingrays parents there who have been doing this for years, too, and they are always happy to answer questions and explain what is happening.



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Parents have another important role at swim meets: as timers and officials. Anyone can and should sign up to take a timing shift at a meet; sign ups can usually be found on a wall behind the blocks or at a table near the entrance. All you have to do is push a couple of buttons, and instruction will be provided before the meet starts. We often have assigned lanes for our team to time at meets, and parents are expected to step up to the task so that the meet can continue.

Officials, on the other hand, go through a comprehensive training process before they are expected to perform on their own. Officials get to learn more about the sport and are an integral part of meet success, including increasing our chances of being invited back to meets. Anyone who is interested in becoming an official at any time should let the coaches know, and we will get you started! Remember, meet coaching fees are waived either in whole or in part when an adult volunteers at the meet.

Once swimmers have completed all of their own events for the day, they are free to go. Some swimmers like to stay and cheer for their friends, which is appreciated but not required. Preliminary results are usually posted at the meet, but final results and awards – if any – are sent in the weeks following. We post results on our bulletin board at the pool and hand out any awards at practice. Most meets only have awards to 6th or 8th place, and races often have thirty or more competitors, so most swimmers do not receive a ribbon: all the more reason to focus on time and technique improvements rather than overall standing.

Finally, a note about relays: relays are a chance for swimmers to compete together as a team. Relays are a lot of fun, but in order enter we have to have enough swimmers of the right age and sex attending the meet the same day. Meets have differing requirements (and some don't have relays at all), so our ability to field relay teams varies. If a swimmer is entered in a relay and does not to come or leaves early, none of the other swimmers on that team will be able to swim in the event, either.

As always, if there are any questions, coaches are available on the pool deck or via email. We'll see you at the pool!

How to decode heat sheets and mark a swimmer's arm:

Event number	Event name	Lane	Name	Age	Team	Seed Time
Heat 1	Boys 13-14 50 Yard Freestyle	3	Pelletier, Luca J	13	OCST-OR	NT
		4	Hovhannisyan, Garegin G	13	LOSC-OR	34.09
		5	Hawk, Caedon I	13	DDAC-OR	35.07
Heat 2	Boys 13-14 50 Yard Freestyle	1	Keller, Christian J	13	CS-OR	31.68
		2	Tran, Ricky K	13	DDAC-OR	31.21
		3	Barber, Craig H	13	TDPS-OR	30.58
		4	Maher, Jake H	13	SLST-OR	30.41
		5	Brandell, Harrison	13	OCST-OR	30.57
		6	Cozart, Zachary J	13	OCST-OR	30.93
		7	Blair, Maxwell E	13	RACE-OR	31.60
		8	Kono, Ben H	13	STRY-OR	32.86

On swimmer's arm:

[Event number]	[Heat]	[Lane]	[Event name]
E	H	L	
40	2	8	50 free
46	1	4	200 fly
55	6	1	100 back