

CMSA Swim Meet Overview for Parents

The Value of Competitive Swim Meets in Athlete Development

Competitive swim meets are essential milestones in a swimmer's journey. They provide opportunities to translate training into performance, develop race strategies, and gain valuable experience in a structured environment. Beyond seasonal leagues, meets lay the groundwork for progression, encourage swimmers to challenge themselves, and build resilience and motivation. Participation also opens doors to future athletic possibilities.

Meet Levels

1. Summer League Meets (Local Development Meets)

- Designed for **beginner/intermediate swimmers** currently registered in a summer swim league.
- Includes 3–4 individual events (always 25s and 50s) and sometimes a relay.
- Great starting point for new swimmers.
- Hosted at various facilities in **Baldwin and Mobile counties**.
- **No entry fees.** Coaches will guide sign-ups, which may be done online, by email, or on-site.
- **Parent Tip:**
 - An electronic heat sheet will be provided to help you track event schedules.
 - Some meets provide a **bullpen/clerk of course** area to help organize swimmers before races.

2. Developmental Sprint Series Meets (Small Sanctioned Meets)

- Single-day meets held on Friday afternoons or Saturday mornings.
- Open to **CMSA swimmers ready for the next competitive step**.
- Meets last ~2–2.5 hours and feature a broader range of events, including some longer distances.
- Small entry fee (**\$10 max**).
- Information will be posted on the **CMSA website event dashboard**.
- **Volunteering: Parent timers are essential**—training is provided and you'll be paired with an experienced partner.

3. Invitational Meets

- Multi-team meets hosted by CMSA or other USA Swimming clubs.
- Held over 2–3 days (weekends) and open to all levels.
- **CMSA Invitational Highlights:**
 - **Vance Rose Invitational** – Fall, Short Course

- **Spirit of Mobile Invitational** – Spring, Long Course

Why They Matter:

- Benchmark events for swimmer development and coach evaluation.
- Strongly encouraged for all swimmers, especially **Team Meets** listed on the CMSA calendar.
- Great team bonding—families often organize dinners and social events during travel meets.

4. Championship Meets

- End-of-season events (summer or winter).
- Require **qualifying times** from prior sanctioned meets.
- More competitive and fast-paced, offering valuable high-level experience.
- Entry details and deadlines will come directly from your coach once your swimmer qualifies.

How Meets Work

- Swimmers compete in **age groups** and are grouped by **gender**.
- Events are divided into **heats** with 6–8 swimmers each, depending on the pool.
- **Heat sheets** list swimmers, events, heats, lanes, and seed times.
- CMSA sends heat sheets digitally—bring a **highlighter** to mark events.

What to Bring

- CMSA team suit & cap, goggles (plus a spare)
- At least **two towels**
- Sunscreen, hat, and light clothing for outdoor meets
- Chairs for parents and swimmers
- Healthy snacks and plenty of fluids (avoid heavy meals before racing)
- Pen and highlighter for heat sheets
- **Extras**—because things happen!

Meet Day Procedure

1. **Arrive on time for warm-ups**—late swimmers miss critical instructions.
2. Find where CMSA is seated and check in with your group.
3. Swimmers warm up with their training group, then rest until events begin.
4. Parents track events using the heat sheet and help guide swimmers to the blocks.
5. Coaches will guide swimmers but **athletes are responsible for making their races on time**.
6. Before leaving, **check if your swimmer is on a relay**—leaving early can scratch the team.

Parent Etiquette

- Be **supportive**—leave technical coaching to the coaches.
- **Ask questions** if you need clarity—coaches are happy to help.
- **Volunteer**—timing, concessions, runner, head timer, and other jobs keep meets running smoothly.

Swimmer Etiquette

- **Cheer for your teammates**—build a positive team culture.
- Show **good sportsmanship** to all teams.
- Participate in relays—they're important for team points and camaraderie.
- Always **see your coach before and after races**.
- **Thank your parents** for their support.

Swim Team Terminology

- **Age-group swimming** – The term applied to youth club swimming in America, both year-round and summer league.
 - Swimmers compete in the following age brackets: 8 & under, 9-10, 11-12, 13-14, and 15-18.
 - A swimmer's age on the first day of a meet is their age for the entire meet, even if their birthday occurs during competition.
 - High school and elite meets (e.g., Arena Pro Swim Series) do not divide by age, so younger swimmers may compete against much older athletes.
 - Swimmers under 18 can set national age group records while competing in “open” meets.
- **Alternate** – In a preliminary/finals meet, the two swimmers with the next fastest times after the finalists are designated as alternates in case a finalist cannot compete.
- **Blocks** – The starting platforms from which swimmers begin races. Modern blocks are sleek and high-tech compared to the older metal or wooden designs, but the name has stayed the same.
- **Catch** – The point in a swimmer's stroke when their hand grabs the water ahead of them and applies downward pressure to move the body forward.
- **Circle swim** – A method of sharing a single lane with multiple swimmers by staying on the right side of the lane and moving counterclockwise. This allows more swimmers to train in one lane.
- **Circle seeding** – A seeding method for prelims/finals meets in which the fastest 18–24 swimmers are placed in the last three heats, with the fastest swimmers in the middle lanes (e.g., Lane 4).
- **Club team** – The USA Swimming–sanctioned swim team under which an athlete trains and competes.

- Club affiliation is not used when competing in high school or summer league meets.
- **Crossover turn** – The transition turn used in the individual medley (IM) when switching from backstroke to breaststroke.
- **Cut** – The time standard a swimmer must achieve to qualify for a specific meet.
 - Example: Southeasterns, the championship meet for our LSC, requires specific time standards to participate.
- **Deck** – The area surrounding the pool at practices and meets, not including the bleachers or stands.
 - USA Swimming rules prohibit parents from being on the deck at practice.
 - At meets, only swimmers, coaches, officials, and select volunteers may be on the deck.
- **Distance** – Generally, freestyle events 500 yards or 400 meters or longer. The 400 individual medley can also be considered a distance event.
- **Division I, II, III** – The three levels of competition within the NCAA:
- **Division I** – Best funded, more athletic scholarships (except Ivy League), biggest time commitment.
- **Division II** – Smaller schools, fewer full rides, scholarships often spread across the team.
- **Division III** – No athletic scholarships, less time commitment, better balance between academics and sports. Some top programs can be faster and more competitive than Division I programs.
- **Dolphin kick** – The undulating leg motion used in butterfly, now considered the “fifth stroke.”
 - Done underwater in streamline to build momentum on fly, freestyle, and backstroke starts and turns.
 - One dolphin kick is allowed in breaststroke.
- **Doubles** – Practicing two times a day.
- **Drag** – The forces that slow the swimmer down in the water while moving forward.
- **Drag suit** – Worn over practice suits to increase water resistance, building muscle, endurance, and speed.
- **Dryland** – Physical conditioning done outside of the water.
 - Can include stretching, weight training, resistance work, yoga, Pilates, spin classes, etc.
- **DQ (Disqualification)**: Occurs when a swimmer breaks the rules of the stroke they are performing. Each stroke has specific rules for the start, stroke, turn, and finish that must be followed for the race to be legal.
- **False Start**: Happens when a swimmer leaves the starting block early or is moving on the block after “take your mark” but before the starter signals the race start. Results in disqualification.
- **Finals**: Heats for the fastest swimmers from preliminaries who qualify to compete again during a later session.

- **Flags:** Banners hanging over the pool a set distance from each wall to help backstrokers count strokes and time their turns.
- **Flip Turn:** A turning technique used in freestyle and backstroke races.
- **Glide:** A smooth forward movement while maintaining streamlined form without kicking or arm strokes.
- **Hand Entry:** The hand should enter the water fingers-first, pointing downward, in line with the shoulder to avoid injury.
- **Heats:** Groups of swimmers competing in the same event, arranged by entry/seed time. The fastest swimmers are placed in the middle lanes, with “circle seeding” used for large meets to distribute the fastest across the last few heats.
- **Heat Sheet:** Printed listing of all heats and lanes for each event. Helps swimmers know the order of events and their assignments so they can plan warm-ups, rest, and avoid missing their heat.
- **High Elbow:** Technique during recovery phase above the water where the elbow remains hinged. This increases surface contact with the water, pushing more water and covering more distance per stroke while helping prevent shoulder injuries.
- **IM:** This term stands for individual medley, an event in which a swimmer performs all four competitive strokes. The order is butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke, freestyle. (The order is different in a medley relay, where the order is back, breast, fly, free.) IM race distances are 100 (one length of each stroke, contested only in a short course, or 25-yard or meter pool, mostly for 10-and-unders), 200 and 400. In a short-course pool, a 200 IM is 50 yards/meters or two pool lengths of each stroke; in a long-course or 50-meter pool, it’s one length. In a 400 IM, the swimmer does 100 yards/meters of each stroke. In short-course, that’s four lengths; in long course, it’s two.
- **IMR/IMX:** IMX stands for IM Extreme and IMR stands for IM Ready. During each season whenever you swim an event the time is registered on the USA swimming web site. Different times score different “power points”. The faster the time the higher the power points are for each swimmer.
- **Kick set:** Legs only, no pulling with arms
Intervals: The amount of time given to complete a given distance, plus rest. (Ex: 4 x 200 on 3:00: This means the swimmer has 3 minutes to complete 200 yards before starting the next one.)
- **Long course:** A 50-meter pool. This is the true definition of Olympic-sized pool. Most long course racing is done from April to August. A swimmer’s long-course times will generally be slower because there are fewer turns. There are several online calculators for converting short-course times to long and vice versa.

- **LSC:** A separate and independent corporation to whom USA Swimming has delegated certain governing and supervisory responsibilities within the geographic boundaries designated by USA Swimming. There are 59 LSCs under USA Swimming. CMSA belongs to the Southeastern LSC, which includes all but 2 counties in Alabama, the state of Tennessee and a portion of the panhandle of Florida.
- **Medley Relay:** A combination of four swimmers, each swimming one of the four strokes. The order of a medley relay is Backstroke, Breaststroke, Butterfly, and Freestyle.
- **Negative Split:** Swimming the second half of a race faster than the first half.
- **Open Turn:** The two-handed touch turn completed for Breaststroke, Butterfly, and during the Butterfly to Backstroke, and Breaststroke to Freestyle turns of the Individual Medley.
- **Psych Sheet:** An entry sheet showing all swimmers entered into each individual event, listed by seed times to show how you are seeded compared to other swimmers in a particular event. Unlike a heat sheet, the psych sheet does not show heat and lane assignments.
- **Recovery:** This term has two meanings for swimmers. It can pertain to the point in the stroke in which the hand is above the water line preparing for the next stroke. It can also be used to describe the process of resting and refueling after practice or a race.
- **Sanctioned Meet:** Meets must be sanctioned by USA Swimming or an affiliated Local Swim Committee (LSC) to be official. This ensures adherence to standard rules and provides insurance coverage.
- **Scratch:** To withdraw from an event at a meet. Oftentimes, heading into a major meet, swimmers will enter every event for which they have qualified in order to keep their options open and then withdraw (or opt not to compete in finals) based on how they feel at the meet.
- **Sculling:** A drill in which the swimmer gently moves their forearms and hands back and forth through the water, developing a sense of how each move affects the swimmer's forward progress. Set: A self-contained part of the swimming session practice as set by the coach. For example a main set might be 10 times 100 m free
- **Seeding:** The process of assigning swimmers to lanes and heats by time. In general the swimmers with the slower seed times swim in the earlier heats. The order of swimming in the final heats depends on the type of meet.
- **Short course:** In America, this term usually means a 25-yard pool. Most USA Swimming sanctioned racing during the fall, winter and spring is done in short-course yards, including high school and college meets. The term can also pertain to 25-meter pools, although they are more common in summer league and abroad.

- **Southeasterns:** The championship meet for the Southeastern Swimming LSC. In order to qualify to swim at this meet, swimmers must achieve a minimum time standard (“cut”), set forth each season by the LSC.
- **Split:** The time for a portion of a race, such as each 50 of a 100-yard-race. Coaches will compare the split for the first (or front half) part of a race with the second (or back half) to determine where the swimmer was fastest and slowest. A negative split means the swimmer swam the second half faster than the first.
- **Streamline:** When the body is pointing in a long, straight line with the arms at the ears, locked together with one hand on top of the other, while the legs are together and the toes are pointed. It is used on starts and turns because it minimizes drag or resistance underwater.
- **Swim down or warm down:** Recovery after an intense workout or race to help the muscles of the body prepare for the next race.
- **Taper:** A few weeks before a major meet, the coach will begin scaling back the volume or workload at practice in favor of working on fine details, like starts and turns. This allows the swimmer to get more rest in hopes of dramatically improving their times at their goal meet.
Warning: You may find your swimmer suddenly has a lot more energy after practice while at the same time telling you, “I can’t take the garbage out because I’m on taper.”
- **Yardage:** The total distance your swimmer covers in per practice, day or week (also referred to as volume) and usually measured in yards (e.g. “my child’s group practices 5,000 yards a day or 25,000 yards a week”). This number can vary widely depending on your child’s age, whether s/he sprinter or distance swimmer, how long the practice is and their coach’s philosophy. Note: it’s still called yardage even when they’re swimming long course meters.
- **Underwaters:** The time a swimmer spends below the surface doing dolphin kick in streamline position or the breaststroke pullout. Swimmers are permitted to go 15 yards or meters underwater off the start or turn.
- **USA Swimming:** The National Governing Body for the sport of swimming in the United States. They are charged with promoting the culture of swimming by creating safe and healthy opportunities for athletes and coaches of all backgrounds to participate and advance in the sport through clubs, events and education. Their membership is comprised of swimmers of every age and ability, all the way up to the Olympic Team, as well as coaches, officials and volunteers. USA Swimming is responsible for selecting and training teams for international competition, including the Olympic Games, and administer competitive swimming in accordance with the Ted Stevens Olympic & Amateur Sports Act.

- **Zones:** A regional long-course championship meet held at the end of the summer, comprised of age-group swimmers from one of four zones: eastern, western, central or southern. In this case, swimmers may represent their city or state on a relay with swimmers from other clubs.