

What do you mean, my child was DQ'D?

If you're not a former swimmer, the strokes and their rules can be a cause of bewilderment. While the stroke rules are simple enough for a six-year-old to understand, most people do not have a copy of the USA Swimming Rules, so we'll briefly describe the strokes below (see USA Swimming website for the complete stroke rules). Failure to follow the stroke rules will be denoted by a "DQ", Disqualification, of the swimmer and no points, times, or ribbons will be awarded for the swim.

The judging of the stroke is performed by "Stroke and Turn" Officials. Each Official covers multiple lanes and when they detect a violation of a stroke rule the Official will note this by raising one hand and by writing "DQ" with the reason on the DQ slip.

Freestyle

The Freestyle is defined as any means of swimming across the pool. Any stroke and kick are acceptable. There are, however, a few don'ts associated with this stroke, specifically: (1) You cannot walk on the bottom of pull yourself along using the lane lines. (2) In a 50-yard race (two pool lengths) you must touch the wall at the 25-yard end before touching the wall at the 50-yard end (this may seem obvious, but sometimes swimmers miss the wall at the turning end of the pool). (3) After the swimmer surfaces after a start or turn they must remain on the surface of the water.

Backstroke

Like the Freestyle, almost anything goes in Backstroke as long as you stay on your back. Watching swimmers learn the Backstroke is a perverse sense of fun as they bounce off lane lines and wonder where they are. Eventually, they will learn to guide off the lane lines, use the overhead Backstroke flags and the lane line markings to know where they are in the pool, as well as count strokes from the flags to the wall. Backstroke starts are different from all others because the swimmer is in the water, feet planted against the wall, and hanging to the bar or lip of the pool awaiting the starter's signal.

9 and up swimmers will eventually learn the Backstroke flip turn. This is the one exception to staying on your back and can be used only as part of a turn (not a finish) at the pool wall.

Breaststroke

The Breaststroke has two components, the kick and the arm pull. The kick is a "frog" type kick and toes must be pointed outward during the propulsive part of the kick. The arm pull and kick must be in an alternating sequence (pull then kick) and hands may not go all the way to the hips. Breaststroke turns and finish require a simultaneous two-hand touch.

Butterfly

A well-executed Butterfly (or Fly) is the most beautiful exhibition of power you will ever see in a swimming pool and one of the hardest to perfect. There are two components of the fly; the arm pull and the kick. The arm pull must be an over the water recovery (elbows break the surface of the water) with the arms moving simultaneously. The kick is a dolphin style kick with both legs moving simultaneously up and down. Unlike the Breaststroke, there is no requirements to alternate kick and pull. Turns and finish require a simultaneous two-hand touch at the wall.

Individual Medley

The Individual Medley (or IM) is when an individual swims each of the four strokes in the sequence of Butterfly, Backstroke, Breaststroke, and Freestyle. This is the most mentally challenging of all events as a swimmer must be competent in all 4 strokes, remembering the sequence, stroke rules, turns and finishes. In a 100-yard IM, every turn is a stroke change and stroke finish rules apply to the transition. This means that the swimmer must compete a legal finish of the stroke before they began the next stroke. In the 200 and 400 IM, a swimmer will perform a turn based on the stroke, i.e.: backstroke flip turn at the 25-yard mark of the 50-yard backstroke leg in the 200 IM.

Relays

There are two kinds of Relays; the Freestyle Relay and the Medley Relay. Both involve a team of four swimmers, each swimming one quarter of the total distance. In the Freestyle Relay, each swimmer swims the Freestyle. In the Medley Relay, the sequence is Backstroke, Breaststroke, Butterfly, and Freestyle (note this is a different order than the IM). In all Relays each swimmer must wait until the previous swimmer touches the wall prior to leaving the deck.

What is a DQ?

In swimming, the rules must be followed in total or a disqualification, or DQ, is committed. This can be traumatic the first time a swimmer is DQ'd for just one mistake; but it isn't fair to other swimmers who swim the entire race per the rules to do otherwise. A DQ is a violation of the rules observed by any appropriate official. Below are some of the more common violations.

Freestyle:

- Failure to touch the wall at the turning end of the pool
- Walking on the bottom of the pool
- Pulling on the lane lines
- Exiting the pool before swimming the specified distance

Backstroke:

- Past vertical towards the breast at any time except during flip turn
- Leaving the wall after a turn past vertical towards the breast
- Improper flip turn
- Being completely submerged underwater at the finish

Breaststroke:

- Incorrect kick, such as scissor kick or flutter kick
- Non-simultaneous two hand touch or one hand touch at the turn or finish
- Toes not pointed outward during the propulsive part of the kick
- More than one stroke underwater at the start or turn
- Arm recovery past the hips except for the first stroke after start or turn
- Head didn't break the surface by conclusion of the second arm pull underwater after the start or turn

Butterfly:

- Non-simultaneous or one-handed wall touch at the turn or finish
- Non-simultaneous leg movement during kicks
- Arms don't break the water surface during the recovery (judged at the elbows)
- Non-simultaneous arm movement during recovery

Relay Races:

- A swimmer leaves the deck or wall before the previous swimmer touches the deck or wall

False Start:

- A swimmer starts the race early

How will I know a DQ occurred?

Unlike football, we don't blow a whistle and announce to the world that a rule violation has occurred. When a Stroke and Turn Judge (also called an Official) observes a violation, he raises his hand to signify that he has observed a violation then, writes it up on a DQ slip that gets attached to a swimmer's entry card. Another clue that a DQ has occurred is a Stroke and Turn Judge writing and a longer than normal pause between heats/events.

How do I know if my child DQ'd?

You can also look for a Stroke and Turn Judge to raise their hand while viewing your swimmer's lane. Another way to find out is by reading the official Meet Results, which are posted at the pool during an Invitational or sent out after a Dual Meet.

A word about Officials and DQs

Every Official on the deck will always give the benefit of the doubt to the swimmer. Although the difference between ugly vs. illegal is sometimes close to call, any violation called by an official is an "I saw" not an "I think I saw". Every year the Officials are trained on the current rules and procedures of USA swimming, who's rules we follow. Most importantly, these Officials are volunteer parents that have a hard job to do so please be polite to them (even if your swimmer was DQ'd). Remember that they are required to DQ any swimmer who swims a stroke illegally which can even include their own child (which happens frequently).