



## New Parent Handbook

The FAST Falcons are the official club swim team of FAST. Our mission is to promote overall swimming development while striving towards competitive excellence. We will ensure a safe, healthy, and positive environment for all our athletes while helping them reach their fullest potential.

Dear FAST Parent,

Welcome! As a member of FAST, your child is training with a well-educated, highly experienced coaching staff, in one of the world's premier swimming and training facilities. Furthermore, your child is training with other dedicated athletes and is associating with other inspired families.

Ultimately, your child's swimming horizon is influenced by his/her individual desire, dedication and commitment. Guiding and developing these personal attributes has a marked impact on your child's quality of involvement and performance in swimming. It is the FAST philosophy that it takes the coordinated effort of athlete, parent and professional to help your child be the best he/she wants to be. We are a swimming family committed to athletic excellence, self-discipline, integrity, and lifetime development for all ages and abilities.

To facilitate your child's development in the sport, the FAST coaching staff attends to the following aspects of training:

- "In water training" which consists of all warm-ups, drills, intervals, stroke techniques and competitions
- "Dry land training" which consist of stretching, calisthenics and other strength enhancing exercise done out of water
- "Psychological training" which consists of positive attitudes toward self and others, practice and race strategies, goal setting and team meetings and activities.

All three aspects work in concert and are important factors in a successful swimming career.

If at any time, you should have questions or experience problems, please contact your child's coach. Good communication is essential to performance improvement and to quickly resolving issues. Each coach is available by phone and email and generally has a few minutes before and after practice to schedule meetings.

With everyone's cooperation and hard work, we feel certain your swimmer will enjoy a successful and fulfilling season.

Welcome to FAST and enjoy!

## ABOUT FAST FALCONS

The FAST Falcons were established in April 2022 to provide competitive swimming excellence to Ocala and surrounding communities. We are a program operating under the Circle Square Foundation nonprofit organization, and we train at the Florida Aquatics Swimming and Training Facility. Circle Square Foundation Trustee Kenneth D. Colen states, “The performance mindset learned at FAST is carried beyond the pool and into that person’s life. FAST is for the betterment of the community as a whole”

This handbook is designed for new Falcons parents, but everyone is encouraged to use it as a resource. While this resource will answer some questions you may have, it’s just a starting point. We will have biannual parent meetings in the Fall and the Spring, and our staff is always ready to help! Please use the following list to help direct your questions:

- For questions about the overall program, please contact our Head Coach at [Chris\\_George@floridafast.com](mailto:Chris_George@floridafast.com).
- For specific questions about your child or your child’s group, please contact your child’s primary coach.
- For billing questions, please contact [Business\\_Manager@floridafast.com](mailto:Business_Manager@floridafast.com).
- For questions about the Senior program, please contact Coach Chris at [Chris\\_George@floridafast.com](mailto:Chris_George@floridafast.com).
- For questions about the Age Group program (Developmental, Age Group, and Junior), please contact Coach Dave at [dave\\_crocker@floridafast.com](mailto:dave_crocker@floridafast.com).
- For questions about the Master’s program, please contact Coach Michael at [Michael\\_Marshall@floridafast.com](mailto:Michael_Marshall@floridafast.com).
- For questions about the Stroke Academy, please contact Jaquan DeJesus at [jaquan\\_dejesus@floridafast.com](mailto:jaquan_dejesus@floridafast.com).

## COMPETITIVE SWIMMING 101

### **Governing Organizations**

USA Swimming: USA Swimming is the national governing body for the sport of swimming. The FAST Falcons are a USA Swimming registered club. All members of the FAST Falcons must be registered with USA Swimming. Membership, which is renewed in the fall of each year, provides limited, co-benefit accident and liability insurance for swimmers participating in supervised workouts and swim meets. Visit [www.usaswimming.org](http://www.usaswimming.org) for more information including rules, current time standards, and many other resources for parents and swimmers.

Florida Swimming: Florida Swimming is a member of USA Swimming and is the Local Swim Committee (LSC) that governs our geographic area. Its responsibilities include processing memberships, scheduling competitions, training /certification of officials, athlete recognition programs, and assembling Florida camps and select teams. Visit [www.FloridaSwimming.com](http://www.FloridaSwimming.com) for more information.

### **Geographic Structure**

USA Swimming divides the country into four zones: Western, Central, Eastern, and Southern. The FAST Falcons, as part of Florida Swimming, competes in the Southern Zone.

### **Seasonal Structure (Short vs. Long Course)**

Swimming is a year-round sport that is divided into two seasons, with championship-level meets held at the end of each season.

The short course season lasts from September through March. All practices and meets are typically conducted in 25-yard pools. The United States uses short course pools for high school and college seasons. Florida Swimming conducts high school swimming during the Fall. NCAA conducts their swim season during the winter.

The long course season lasts from April through early August. Most swim meets are conducted in 50meter pools. Practices are held in a combination of 25-yard and 50-meter pools. All international competition takes place in either 25-meter or 50-meter pools. The Olympics are always held in a 50meter pool.

### **Time Standards**

USA Swimming establishes motivational time standards for each age group every four years. The current standards will be in place until August 31, 2024 and are available on USA Swimming's website here: <https://www.usaswimming.org/docs/default-source/timesdocuments/time-standards/2024/2021-2024national-age-group-motivational-times.pdf>.

Time standards and age determine the type of meet in which a swimmer may participate. Age group standards progress from (slower to faster) B, BB, A, AA, AAA, and AAAA. In addition, there are specific time standards for various championship meets that will be provided as appropriate for your swimmer.

Unless a swimmer has previously competed in a USA Swimming meet, s/he will be entered with NT (No Time) in swim meets. If the swimmer has competed in a USA Swimming meet with another team, please turn in his/her best times to one of the Falcons coaches so the times can be entered in our database.

### **The Sport of Swimming**

There are four competitive strokes in swimming- freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke and butterfly. In addition, there is the individual medley which features all four strokes. Relay events are comprised of four swimmers per relay team, each swimming  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the total distance of the event.

A swim team is composed of any number of swimmers. Participants compete in different age groups and meets depending on their achievement level and how old they are on the first day of the meet.

Nationally recognized age groups are 10 & under, 11-12, 13-14, 15-16, 17-18 and 15-18, Senior or Open competition has no upper or lower age limitations. Local meets may also provide events for 8 & under swimmers.

Each swim meet offers a variety of events and distances, depending on the age group and classification.

Each swimming stroke has specific rules designed to ensure that no swimmer gets an unfair competitive advantage. The technical rules for each stroke may be found in the publication, "USA Swimming Rules and Regulations."

Trained officials observe the swimmers during each event to ensure compliance with these technical rules. If a swimmer commits an infraction of the rules, he/she will be disqualified from that event, which means he/she will not receive an official time nor be eligible for an award in that event.

If your child is disqualified in an event, be supportive rather than critical. For beginning swimmers, a disqualification should be treated as a learning experience, not as punishment. A disqualification alerts the swimmer and coach to what portions of the swimmer's stroke need to be corrected. They should be considered in the same light as an incorrect answer in schoolwork. The disqualification is necessary to keep the competition fair and equitable for all other competitors. A supportive attitude on the part of the official, the coach, and the parent can also keep it a positive experience for the disqualified swimmer.

Officials are present at all competitions to implement the technical rules of swimming and to ensure that the competition is fair and equitable. Officials attend clinics, pass a written test and work meets before being certified. All parents are encouraged to get involved with some form of officiating. If you are interested in becoming an official, please reach out to Coach Cameron.

## PARENT ROLE AT FAST

### **Parent-Athlete Support**

It is the coach's job to offer constructive criticism of a swimmer's performance. It is the parent's role to provide love, recognition, and encouragement necessary to help a young athlete feel positive about him/herself. Be the person that your swimmer can look to for constant, positive reinforcement.

Every individual learns at a different rate and responds differently to the various methods of skill presentation. Some swimmers take more time to learn; this requires patience on the part of the coach and the parent, both of whom must remember that the swimmer's ultimate swimming potential may be as great or greater than that of a faster learner.

Avoid comparing the skill, courage, determination, attitude, performance, or improvement of your swimmer to other swimmers. Swimmers mature physiologically and psychologically at different ages; the weakest swimmer in a practice group this year could be leading practices in the future.

*"Your child's success or lack of success in sports does not indicate what kind of parent you are. But, having an athlete that is coachable, respectful, a great teammate, mentally tough, resilient and tries their best, IS a direct reflection of your parenting." Author Unknown*

### **Parent Support**

There are lots of ways to be a great swim parent!

**VOLUNTEER:** All parents are expected to help at home meets. We are also looking for new members for our Fun Committee or Officials Committee!

**READ:** Be sure to read all emails. We would not send out information if it was not important.

**LEARN:** While not all internet sites are applicable or credible, we have a few websites that you should bookmark!

- Team website- <https://www.gomotionapp.com/team/fastfalcons/page/home>
- FAST Facility website- <https://floridafast.com/>
- Florida Swimming website- <https://www.teamunify.com/team/szflisc/page/home>.
- USA Swimming website- <https://www.usaswimming.org/>

**ATTEND Meetings:** We have bi-annual meetings, volunteer training sessions, and more!

### **Guidelines for Watching Practice**

Parents are allowed to observe all practices at the FAST Facility. Here are some important guidelines when observing practice.

First, young swimmers want parental approval more than anything in the world. For swimmers to learn as much as possible during practice, it is important that coaches have each swimmer's undivided attention.

Second, we ask you to respect the practice time and not interrupt a coach during practice. If you need to communicate with a coach on a subject matter that needs more than a simple answer, please schedule an appointment with the coach so it can be answered in the most appropriate way.

Third, our coaches spend a considerable amount of time planning weekly training sessions for each of their practice groups. Every training set or instructional drill has a purpose. One practice and/or practice set often builds on another during each week. Remember what you may be seeing is a snapshot of the bigger progression, you may not understand the purpose of what the swimmers are doing on any given day.

Lastly, to help continue to build positive relationship moments with your swimmer, when observing practice there should be no video recording or filming of any kind. Please do not coach or advise your swimmer based on what you see (or think you don't see) him/her do during practice. Many times when teaching stroke skills, coaches ask their swimmers to do things that may not look correct or actually might be illegal during competition. However, the drills have an important purpose in teaching skills. Swimming a one-arm butterfly stroke or using a flutter kick with breaststroke are examples of drills with a specific purpose.

To comply with USA Swimming Insurance coverage, anyone on the pool deck must be a USA Swimming member coach or a USA Swimming athlete member. USA Swimming's Insurance is void if the rules are not followed. Therefore, parents should watch practice from the following areas:

- Indoor Pool- Parents are permitted to sit in the upstairs bleachers.
- Outdoor Pool- Parents are permitted to sit in the viewing area by the Splash Pad. There are picnic tables and charging stations available for use.
- Note: Please make sure siblings are safe, courteous, and well-behaved at all times.
- Note: Please make sure the area is clean before leaving.

### **Guidelines for Supportive Parents**

- Supportive parents focus on mastering sport skills and strategies rather than competitive ranking.
- Supportive parents decrease the pressure to win.
- Supportive parents believe that sport's primary value is the opportunity for self-development.
- Supportive parents communicate their true concerns directly with the coach.
- Supportive parents understand and respect the differences between parental roles and coaching roles.
- Supportive parents control negative emotions and think positively.
- Supportive parents avoid the use of fear.
- Supportive parents recognize and understand expressions of insecurity.
- Supportive parents avoid the use of guilt.
- Supportive parents show empathy for the young athlete.

## **Volunteering**

As a non-profit youth sports team, we are 100% dependent on parent support to run our FAST hosted meets, and your help is greatly appreciated. The significant benefit of hosting meets for our own team cannot be overstated. Hosting our own meets helps our families stay closer to home, allows coaches to choose events best suited for our team, and provides significant financial support.

Because it takes many volunteers to staff swim meets and make events possible for our swimmers, we will implement a Meet Volunteer policy. Starting on April 1, 2023, all FAST families are required to work at our hosted meets as detailed below.

- For timed final meets, each Falcon family with a swimmer entered in the meet is expected to work one session. Failure to appear will result in a \$100 fine for each shift not fulfilled.
- For prelim-final meets, each Falcon family with a swimmer entered in the meet is expected to work two sessions. Failure to appear will result in a \$100 fine for each shift not fulfilled.

For FAST hosted meets, a volunteer sign-up page will be posted on the website and communicated to membership on the Monday of the meet by 5:00 PM. The jobs will be on a first come, first serve basis, so if you have a preferred job, sign up quickly! Families have until 5:00 PM on Tuesday to sign up for the volunteer position of their choice. Families who have not signed up by 5:00 PM on Tuesday will be assigned a volunteer position.

If a family is not able to fulfill a volunteer position at a meet, the family can ask another teammate to fill the family's position or pay a \$100 fine. **Please note that we want your help more than we need your money.**

## **Job Descriptions for Meets**

**AWARDS:** In awards the workers place labels on the proper award for the swimmer and place them in the box provided for each team attending the meet.

**TIMERS:** Timers are back up for our electrical touch pad system. There are ideally two timers per lane. Your job is to time the swimmer in your lane and record that time on the timer sheet or card.

**MEET MARSHALL:** Safety is an essential part of a well-run event. Marshalls patrol the pool deck and make sure that athletes refrain from dangerous behavior and keep their areas clean.

**HOSPITALITY:** The hospitality room has snacks and meals for coaches, officials, and volunteers working the meet.

**OFFICIALS:** Training is required for this position. Contact Coach Cameron if you are interested in becoming an official.

**CLERK OF COURSE:** Wrangling our youngest swimmers and helping them get to their race on time and in the right heat and lane.

## Communication

Great communication between athletes, parents, and coaches is critical in any youth sport experience. The FAST Falcons staff works to communicate all the information you need. There are several critical paths that the staff uses to communicate:

- You will receive weekly emails on Saturday. Generally, this email communicates practice schedule changes, upcoming dates and deadlines, and important teamwide information. If you are not receiving this email, please check your spam folder or send an email to [Business\\_Manager@floridafast.com](mailto:Business_Manager@floridafast.com).
- You will receive emails from your child's primary coach. These emails are geared more to your child's group and provides information about group goals, practice reports, and more.
- We have a team website with many resources including our meet schedule, our practice schedule, a time standards page, and a parent page.
- We have our social media accounts including Instagram.
- When in doubt, reach out to your coach!

## **PRACTICE EXPECTATIONS**

### **Goals & Objectives**

The FAST Falcons strives for continuity across all of our programs, so that children can enter swim lessons, continue learning with our Stroke Academy, progress into a competitive team member, and return as a master swimmer. Similarly, we strive for continuity and developmental progression through our competitive team divisions.

The FAST Falcons consist of many divisions, broken into levels based on experience, maturity, time commitment, and performance.

<b>Division</b>	<b>Groups</b>	<b>Ages</b>
Non-Competitive	Stroke Academy I and II	6-10/ 11- 18
Developmental	Guppy, Dolphin, Shark	6-10
Age Group	Age Group I and II	11-12
Junior	Junior I and II	13-14
Senior	Senior I, II, and III	14 and over
Adult	Masters and Triathlon Club	18 and over

An explanation of our group structures, skill sets, and objectives can be found on the team website.

## **Competition Schedule**

The competition schedule for each season is available on Team Unify (TU) under the meets and events tab. Coaches will send weekly emails to the families in each practice group that will include any updates or changes. If you have questions about which meets your child should attend, please contact your coach.

## **Meet Attendance & Events**

- Swimmers attend all recommended meets.
- The coaching staff decides which meets swimmers attend and which events they compete in. This is communicated via group email.
- Swimmers typically attend 1-2 weekend meets per month.

## **Entering Meets**

- When FAST receives meet information from the team hosting the meet, coaches will post a sign up on the team website.
- If you are able to attend the entire meet, you must log onto your account and go to the Events section. Select “Attend/Decline” next to the appropriate meet. Click on your swimmer’s name and select “yes” from the drop-down menu. This must be done by the declaration deadline.
- Inform your coach, in the notes section of the declaration prior to the deadline, of any personal or family commitments that will keep your swimmer(s) from fully participating in the entire meet session. (i.e. “Unable to swim on Sunday,” “must leave the meet by noon,” etc.)
- Always remember to click on “Save Changes”!
- Once the declaration period has ended, it is up to the swimmer’s coach, not the parent, to choose the events each swimmer will compete in. Parents may request events in the comments box, but the coach has the final decision on a swimmer’s events.
- Before the meet entries are due to the host team, a report of our team’s DRAFT entries will be available for final review on the team website. Changes or drops will be made during this period, usually 24-48 hours. This is your last chance to un-commit from the swim meet.
- Please contact your athlete’s coach immediately if there is an error.
- Once the meet entry file and fees have been submitted to the host team, your credit card will be charged for the entry fees and the entry fees are non-refundable.
- Read all meet information emails. These provide information on location, warm up times, where to sit/park, etc.

## **Meet Entry Fees**

For every event your child is entered in a swim meet there is a meet entry fee. These usually run about \$4.00 - \$12.00 per individual event. Some facilities/pools also charge a facility surcharge. There can also be a Florida Swimming surcharge. Everything will be listed in the meet information.

Once your child is entered in a meet, the club pays for all its entries, and you are billed on your statement for your child’s events. You are responsible for meet entry fees once your child has been entered. We are billed for the original entry sent to the meet. In addition, meet hosts must pay a surcharge to Florida Swimming for entry fees collected.

## **Swim Meet Procedures**

- Arrive at the pool 15-20 minutes prior to the scheduled warm-up time and locate the FAST team area where all team members sit.
- If there is positive check in find the check in area and let the official know that you are swimming. This usually entails putting your initials by your name. The check in sheets is divided into girls and boys and by age group. IF CHECK IN IS REQUIRED, AND THE SWIMMER IS NOT CHECKED IN, THE SWIMMER MAY NOT SWIM THE EVENT! This is very important.
- Warm-ups are always conducted by the FAST coaching staff. It is very important for all swimmers to warm-up with the team.
- All FAST swimmers are required to wear the team suit and FAST team cap during both warmups and actual competition. Swimmers also are asked to wear their team t-shirts. All other team apparel is optional but encouraged to promote team unity and pride.
- Each swimmer is responsible for knowing which events s/he is swimming and for being on time to swim his/her event. It is customary to write event numbers, heat and lane assignments on a swimmer's hand, arm, or leg. You can get that information via Meet Mobile (a swimming app). If the coaching staff receives lane assignments before the meet, the staff will post this document on the team website.
- A swimmer's event number will be called, usually over the loudspeaker. Swimmers should report with his/her cap and goggles to the starting area.
- At the conclusion of each race, younger swimmers are expected to go immediately to their coach. Older swimmers should warm down first, if possible, and then see their coach.
- Electronic timing is used at most meets. Generally, the official time is the one recorded in the computer when the swimmer touches the touch pad. This time appears on the scoreboard, however, if a swimmer misses the touch pad, or if there is a mechanical failure, various back-up times may be used. The timing and score keeping personnel analyze all times to determine the official times, which are then posted as final results.
- According to USA Swimming rules, parents are not allowed in the immediate competition venue unless they are serving in an official capacity. Similarly, all questions concerning meet results, an officiating call, or the conduct of a meet should be referred to the FAST coaching staff. They, in turn, will pursue the matter through the proper channels.
- In between races, swimmers are asked to rest and stay warm. All energy should be stored up and used in competition. Stay hydrated and eat light, nutritious snacks as needed.
- It is very important that parents and/or swimmers check with the coaching staff prior to leaving the swim meet.
- Before leaving the facility, please clean up your area and make sure you have all your belongings.

## **Swim Meet Miscellaneous**

Packing: Towels, suits, and t-shirts look like other members on your team, so make sure that names are on tags and labels. Be sure to bring towels. Bring cap and goggles (you might want to bring two of each, just in case). The average length of a swim meet is approximately four hours per session, so bring plenty of things to do in between races: homework, games, cards, books, etc. Some swimmers bring sleeping bags or mats to lie on between swims. Sometimes there's a snack bar, but if swimmers are picky eaters, you might want to bring something from home to eat or drink. No glass containers are allowed.

What happens if your child has a disappointing swim?

If your child has a poor race and come out of it feeling bad, talk about the good things. Never dwell on the negative things. Great things for parents to say include “I’m glad to be here with you.” or “I enjoy watching you compete.” There is nothing wrong with a swimmer negatively evaluating a race, as long as s/he can see the positive. No swimmer has ever dropped time in every single race over a multiple year career. Disappointing swims are a part of the learning process, and many times swimmers learn more from failures than successes.

## **Glossary of Common Swimming Terms**

Block - The starting block.

Cap - A latex or lycra swim cap used during race or workout to protect swimmer's hair from the effects of chlorine in the water as well as help cut down water resistance from the swimmer's hair. FAST swimmers wear a team cap at practice and events.

False Start - Occurs when a swimmer leaves the starting block early or is moving on the block before the starter official starts the race. In USA Swimming, one false start will result in an automatic disqualification from the race.

FINA - Federation Internationale di Natation de Amateur, the international governing body of competitive swimming, diving, water polo and synchronized swimming.

Final - The championship final of an event in which the fastest eight, ten, sixteen, twenty, or twenty-four swimmers from the morning preliminaries compete.

Goggles - Eyewear worn by swimmers in the pool to protect the swimmers' eyes from the effects of chlorine in the water.

Gutter - The area at the edge of the pool in which water overflows during a race and is recirculated into the pool. Deep gutters catch surface waves and don't allow them to wash back into the pool and affect the race.

Official - A judge on the deck of the pool. Various judges watch the swimmer's strokes, turns, and finishes or are timers.

IM - Slang for the individual medley, an event in which the swimmer uses all four competitive strokes in the following order: butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke, freestyle.

Lane Lines - The dividers used to delineate the individual lanes. These are made of individual finned disks strung on cable which rotate on the cable when hit by a wave. The rotating disks dissipate surface tension waves in a competitive pool.

Long Course - A pool configured for swimming with a 50-meter-long racing course. World records may be set in long course and short course competition. The main USA Swimming Long Course season is during the summer months. The Olympic Games as well as most major international competitions are conducted long course.

Negative Split - A race strategy in the distance freestyle events in which a swimmer covers the second half of the race faster than the first half.

Prelim - Races in which swimmers qualify for the championship and consolation finals in the events.

Relay Exchange - The exchange between the swimmer in the water and the next swimmer on the relay team.

Short Course - A pool configured in 25 yard or 25-meter lengths.

Split - A swimmer's intermediate time in a race. Splits are registered every 50 meters or 25 yards depending on the pool and are used to determine a swimmer's pace.

Touch - The finish of the race.

Touchpad - The area at the end of each lane in the pool where a swimmer's time is registered and sent electronically to the timing system and the scoreboard.

Uniform - Team apparel worn to practices and meets.

USA Swimming - The National governing body for amateur competitive swimming in the United States.

Warm Down - Used by the swimmer to rid the body of excess lactic acid generated during a race.

Warm Up - Used by the swimmer before the race to get their muscles loose and ready to race.