

What to Expect at a USA Swimming Swim Meet

General Information

Attending a swim meet can be very exciting and hectic. Understanding everything that happens at a swim meet will certainly reduce some anxiety from both the swimmer and the parents. Swim meets are a great opportunity for the whole family to spend time together as well as with all the other families on the TASC team.

Swim meets provide an opportunity for kids to showcase their swimming. After all, they've been practicing for weeks — now it's time to strut their stuff! Swim meets also give coaches a chance to see where they need to go in future practices. The coach can evaluate each swimmer's skills and determine what more needs to be addressed to further improve those skills. So, don't be disappointed if after a great swim the coach launches into a discussion of what went wrong. It's their way of teaching — and it works best while your performance is fresh in the coach's mind and the swimmer's.

Swim meets are usually swum in a 25 yard and 50 meter pools. The swim year is divided into two seasons:

- Short Course meets which are swum in 25 yard pools (Sept – March)
- Long Course meets which are swum in 50 meter pools (April – August)

Swim meets are offered at various levels - for the beginner swimmer on up to the most advanced, and for all age groups. The level of meet your swimmer will compete in will depend on how fast their official recorded times are, and how old they are. However, some meets are open for all swimmers to compete (Open Meets), including swimmers with no officially recorded USA Swimming.

First time USA Swimmers will typically compete in an Open meet for their first meet and will compete in their age category, against their gender, based on how old they are on the first day of the meet. This means that a swimmer may change age group designations in the middle of the season and will start competing against the higher age group at their very next meet. The most common age group categories are:

- 8 and under
- 9-10
- 11-12
- 13-14
- 15&Over (often called Seniors)

Swim Meets usually take place over weekends, often starting on Friday evening. Saturday and Sunday competitions start in the morning and typically run into the afternoon. To control the length of the meet, swimmers are limited to how many events they can compete in each day – typically three or four per day (excluding relays). Be sure to check the meet information (and look for an e-mail the week of the meet) to determine at what time your child might be swimming (they sometimes vary). Either way, you can expect a session to last about 4 hours from warm-ups to the final heat (again, depending on the number of swimmers and events offered). In a few cases, meets are scheduled for a single evening (usually Friday evening). In these meets, all age groups swim in the same session, and the meet typically lasts about 2.5 - 3 hours. Again, be sure to check the calendar, meet information, and occasionally a published timeline to determine the schedule of a particular day/meet. Meets can move along quickly if everything is running smoothly. However, there may also be some down time during which equipment is repaired or replaced, or breaks for swimmers to prepare for long events.

Unlike summer league swimming, swim meets leading up to the season championship meet are not focused on "winning" and "placing" but rather on technical improvement. Technical improvements result in faster swimming, but not always right away. Swimming fast is important, but so is technique, endurance, and race strategy.

Preparing for the Meet

Meet details including dates, qualifying times, cut-offs, event limits, location / directions, etc. can be accessed from the Meet Information posted on swimtasc.org.

What to Bring

- Swimsuit, team cap, and goggles. Having an extra suit, extra cap and an extra pair of goggles packed is always a good idea. These items seem to rip and break at the most inopportune time!
- Towels – wet bodies are everywhere so pack at least two.
- Something comfy for your swimmer to sit on in the team area or bleachers.
- Chairs – depending on the pool facilities, you may or may not need them, but it's a good idea to have them in your vehicle. Most facilities have bleacher-style seats. You may bring a stadium seat if you really want to sit back.
- Several changes of clothes such as sweatpants, sweatshirts, and t-shirts. Swimmers need to stay warm between events and there is nothing worse than pulling on cold, soggy sweatpants. A DC team parka is an excellent way for the swimmer to stay warm while looking sharp. A good idea to bring a change of clothes for the swimmer to leave in as many athlete's shower after the meet (they will also need another dry towel for this).
- Entertainment for the whole family such as travel games, cards, coloring books, books, electronics, etc. Especially important if you are bringing youngsters who are not swimming! Parents often bring newspapers, books, laptops, sewing, anything to pass the time!
- Small cooler of healthy snacks and drinks. Suggestions for items to bring: Water, fruit juice, Gatorade, granola bars, fruit, yogurt, cereal, trail mix, pretzels, sandwiches. There is usually a snack bar, but they may not offer appropriate selections, or selections your child enjoys.
- Sharpie marker, pen, highlighter.
- *Special Parents' Note - The pool area is usually very warm. Make sure you dress appropriately. Nothing is worse than being hot at a swim meet. It makes the time pass very slowly.
- Most importantly – a POSITIVE attitude to pass on to your swimmer(s) along with a lot of encouragement!

The Meet

Before the Meet Starts

- Arrive at least 15 minutes before the start of the TASC warm-up session. This time will be listed in the e-mail that goes out to parents before the meet.
- Locate other TASC swimmers and parents to sit near.
- Swimmers should start getting ready to warm-up. Swimmers' bodies are just like cars on a cold day; they need to get their engine going and warmed-up before being able to go all out. When the warm-ups are about to start, the swimmer should proceed to the swim deck and locate their coach for instructions. Swimmers are not allowed to enter the pool without a coach on deck.
- Only swimmers, coaches and officials (timers, strokes and turn judges, meet referee, etc) are allowed on deck. According to USA Swimming rules, parents are not allowed on deck unless they are serving in an official capacity. Parents must sit in the spectator area, usually bleachers.
- While your swimmer is warming up:
 - o Purchase a heat sheet (listing of all swimmers entered in each event).
 - o Use your highlighter to highlight your swimmer on your heat sheet.
 - o Most heat sheets are now available digitally and are usually free if you have an app subscription to Meet Mobile
- When your swimmer finishes or before warm-ups begin:
 - o Review with your swimmer what events he/she is competing in that day.
 - o Write the event numbers on the arm or wrist of the swimmer with your sharpie pen.
 - o Encourage your swimmer to drink or eat something if they are not scheduled to swim for at least 30 minutes.

- Know what events your swimmer is competing in. It is important for swimmer to know what event numbers he is swimming. Again, a heat sheet and sharpie are a swim parent's best friends!

Heat & Lane Assignments

Swimmers compete in their age category, against their gender, in the order of the event numbers. Generally, girls for a given age group and event compete before the boys. Swimmers are organized into "heats" and lane assignments based on their entry time for that event. At most swim meets, there are no "ready benches" or team volunteers to make sure swimmers get to their heat and lanes on time (most summer league swim programs have this). Swimmers and parents must pay attention to the meet events. Remember the timeline posted on the heat sheet are only estimated times and the actual meet may run significantly slower or faster.

Heat and lane assignments are posted on deck for the swimmers, and usually near the seating section as well, before the start of the event. Where and how can vary from meet to meet, so ask a veteran parent to help you identify how it is being done at your meet.

Obtaining the heat/lane assignments and having swimmers ready & behind the blocks in time for their race is probably the most stressful detail for new swimmers and parents – especially for our younger swimmers. Ask another parent and/or swimmer for help. TEAM WORK. Remember parents are not allowed on deck. This is for safety reasons and to reduce the confusion behind the blocks.

Before Each Race

Listen for event announcements. Upcoming events are usually announced over the loudspeaker. Swimmers should report with cap and goggles. On the way to the starting blocks or to the clerk of course, swimmers are expected to talk to their coaches to inform them of their heat & lane assignments, and to get race instructions. After speaking with their coach, they should stand behind their assigned lane, check with the timer to make sure they are in the right lane, and that they know their heat number. When their heat is called by the starter, they should proceed to the blocks.

After Each Race

Immediately after each race, the swimmer is expected to speak to their coach to get feedback on their race. These discussions are very important and need to happen while it is fresh in both the coach and swimmer's mind. Swimmers will be told what they did correctly, and what they need to work on to improve, regardless of how well they did or did not do in the race. Coaches may ask a swimmer to "warm-down" after a race if the facility has an extra pool. Warming down (swimming slow laps) helps to loosen strained muscles and reduce the lactic acid build-up from the race. By warming-down, the swimmer's muscles recover sooner for their next race. After race talks with coaches and warm-downs should be completed by the swimmer prior to returning to their seats and speaking with their parents. When a swimmer has completed all of events for the day, they are able to go home. Be sure, however, to check with the coach before leaving to make sure your swimmer is not included on a relay. It is not fair to other swimmers who may have stayed to swim on a relay where your swimmer is expected to be a member and he is not there.

Meet Logistics

USA swim meets are run solely by volunteers, each critical to the success of the meet. The meets are organized and run by the local swim club — parents and swimmers just like you. So, be patient when things get long or troubled. Remember, one day, it will be your turn to volunteer at a meet and you'll want folks to be considerate then, too. The volunteer's roles consist of:

- USA Swimming Certified Officials
- Parent timing volunteers from all teams
- Army of host team volunteers

USA Swimming Certified Officials

The officials are the most visible volunteers, wearing dark blue pants/shorts and white shirts. The Meet Referee, Deck Referee, Starters and Stroke & Turn Judges have all gone through a certification program for each position they fill. Many do more than one role during the meet. Unlike many officials in other sports, USA Swimming officials are not there to "catch" swimmers doing something wrong. They are there to "observe" and to make sure the races are swum fairly. Unlike the Olympics, there are not two officials at each end of the pool for each lane. Each stroke and turn judge is responsible for watching multiple lanes and may have to judge both strokes and turns for their end of the pool. Disqualifications are not viewed as a penalty, but as an opportunity for the swimmer to learn what he/she did incorrectly so that they can work with their coach in correcting the mistake. Only coaches are allowed to approach officials to question a call or inquire if a swimmer can be placed in a subsequent heat due to missing their race. Officials do have the authority to remove parents from the pool area if they are abusive or interfere with the running of the meet.

Parent Timing Volunteers

Parents from each team are required to time at meets. Each team is assigned a lane or lanes which they are responsible for. Those assignments are based on the number of swimmers the team has entered in the meet.

Host Team Volunteers

Volunteers from the host team fulfill a wide variety of positions required to prepare for and run a meet successfully. Some of those positions are listed below:

- Meet Director
- Computer Operators
- Equipment Setup
- Clerk of Course
- Head Timer
- Safety Marshals
- Awards
- Heat Sheet
- Concessions & Hospitality
- Setup/Cleanup

FINALLY

When all else fails, remember to ask for help! If during a swim meet a swimmer or parent feels lost or confused, be sure to ask any TASC parent for help! We have all had our "first meets" and know it can be overwhelming. Once you have attended one or two meets, it will all become very routine and enjoyable