



Get Involved: Competition Opportunities for Swimmers with Disabilities

The mission of the Disability Swimming Committee is the full inclusion of swimmers with a disability in USA Swimming programs

USA Swimming Meets

Swimmers with disabilities are welcome in USA Swimming meets. Competition provides the swimmer with opportunities to assess progress toward goals, receive coaching and officiating in a meet environment, and socialize with friends.

- **Age-group competition.** In an age-group meet, swimmers are classified by age (e.g., 10 & under, 11-12, 13-14, 15-16, and 17-18), gender (male, female), and skill level (e.g., A, B, C time standards). Given that "C" meets have no lower time standard, there is a place in age-group competition for every young swimmer, including those who have disabilities. Most LSCs offer annual short course and long course age-group championships. The highest level of age-group competition is the zone championships, and most zones have created opportunities for participation by swimmers with disabilities.
- **Senior competition.** As swimmers become older, faster, and more serious about the sport, they progress to senior meets. Separate events are conducted for males and females, but there are no age groups. Time standards specify the minimum qualifications for participation. In most parts of the country accommodations have been made to allow skilled swimmers with disabilities to enter senior meets regardless of ability to achieve the time standards. Most LSCs offer annual short course and long course senior championships. The next steps in the ladder toward international competitions are sectional meets and national championships. The pinnacle of senior-level swimming is the Olympic Games.
- **Open-water swimming.** Open-water competitions are held in lakes, rivers, and oceans. Senior-level events typically include the 5K, 10K, 15K, and 25K distances. Age-group events often focus on shorter distances. Some swimmers with disabilities, especially those with limited use of the lower body, prefer open-water races because there are no turns.
- **Disability-only competition.** USA Swimming does not offer disability-specific meets or disability-specific events within swimming meets. Swimmers are not classified by disability in any way for USA Swimming meets; however, reasonable accommodations are made to facilitate inclusion.

Disability-Only Competitions

U.S. Paralympics collaborates with Swimming Canada to offer at least two disability-specific competitions in North America each year. In addition, the disability sports organizations included in the links section of this web site offer their own competitions. For example, Wheelchair Sports USA offers an annual junior national championships, and the Dwarf Athletic Association conducts an annual swimming competition at its National Games. Interested swimmers should request details from the organization that hosts the competition.

International Swimming Meets

- **Swimmers with physical disabilities and swimmers who are blind.** The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) conducts the quadrennial summer Paralympic Games in the same years as Olympic Games. For example, recent summer games have been held in Atlanta 1996, Sydney 2000, Athens 2004, and Beijing 2008, with the next games scheduled in London 2012. There are 10 classifications for swimmers with varying physical abilities and 3 classifications that represent different degrees of vision loss. The primary events at the Paralympic Games for most classifications are 50-100-400 freestyle, 100 backstroke, 100 breaststroke, 100 butterfly, 200 IM, 4 x 100 freestyle relay, and 4 x 100 medley relay. Shorter distances are offered in some events for swimmers in the lower ability classifications. A more comprehensive set of events is offered at world championships and for purposes of world records and world rankings. U.S. Paralympics is responsible for selecting USA teams for international competitions.
- **Swimmers who are deaf.** The Comité International des Sports des Sourds (CISS) conducts the quadrennial Deaflympics in the years following the Olympic Games. For example, recent summer Deaflympics have been held in Copenhagen 1997, Rome 2001, and Melbourne 2005, with the next games scheduled in Taipei 2009 and Athens 2013. There is one classification that accommodates swimmers with a 55+ decibel hearing loss in the better ear. The primary events at the Deaflympics are 50-100-200-400-800-1500 freestyle, 100-200 backstroke, 100-200 breaststroke, 100-200 butterfly, 200-400 IM, 4 x 100 and 4 x 200 freestyle relays, and 4 x 100 medley relay. The USA Deaf Sports Federation and its subsidiary U.S. Deaf Swimming group are responsible for selecting USA teams for the Deaflympics and other international competitions.
- **Swimmers with cognitive disabilities.** Special Olympics International (SOI) conducts the quadrennial summer Special Olympics World Games in the years preceding the Olympic Games. Recent summer games were held in New Haven CT 1995, Raleigh NC 1999, Dublin 2003, and Shanghai 2007, with the next games planned for Athens 2011. Participating athletes must have an intellectual disability, a cognitive delay, or closely related developmental disability that results in functional limitations in both general learning and adaptive skills. Athletes are classified/divisioned according to their previous times in competition. A full slate of swimming events is offered. Special Olympics North America works with statewide Special Olympics offices to select USA teams for the Special Olympics World Games.