

The Sport of Swimming

The Basics

Skills

The five competitive swimming strokes are freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly, and individual medley.

Competition

Each swim meet offers a variety of events and distances, depending on the age group and classification. Each swimmer will have a limit to the number of events he or she may swim each day, depending on the meet rules.

In freestyle events, the competitor may swim any stroke. The stroke most commonly used is sometimes called the crawl, which is characterized by the alternate stroking of the arms over the water surface and an alternating (up-and-down) flutter kick. On turns and finishes, some part of the swimmer must touch the wall. Most swimmers do a flip turn.

Backstroke consists of an alternating motion of the arms with a flutter kick while on the back. On turns, swimmers may rotate to the stomach and perform a flip turn and some part of the swimmer must touch the wall. The swimmer must finish on the back.

The breaststroke, which is the oldest stroke dating back hundreds of years, requires simultaneous movements of the arms on the same horizontal plane. The hands are pressed out from in front of the breast in a heart shaped pattern and recovered under or on the surface of the water. The kick is a simultaneous somewhat circular motion similar to the action of a frog. On turns and at the finish, the swimmer must touch the wall with both hands simultaneously at, above or below the water surface.

Some consider the butterfly to be the most beautiful of the strokes. It features a simultaneous recovery of the arms over the water combined with an undulating dolphin kick. In the kick, the swimmer must keep both legs together and may not flutter, scissors or use the breaststroke kick. Both hands must touch the wall simultaneously on the turns and the finish. (The butterfly is the newest stroke and was developed in the early 1950s as a variation of the breaststroke. It became an Olympic stroke in 1956 in Melbourne.)

The individual medley, commonly referred to as the IM, features all four strokes. In the IM, the swimmer begins with the butterfly, then changes after one-fourth of the race to backstroke, then breaststroke and finally freestyle.

In the medley relay, all four strokes are swum. The first swimmer swims backstroke, the second breaststroke, the third butterfly, and the final swimmer anchors the relay with freestyle.

The freestyle relay events consist of four freestylers, each swimming one quarter of the total distance of the event.

Starts: In the start, the swimmer is called to the starting position by the starter who visually checks that all swimmers are motionless. When all swimmers are set, the starting horn is sounded to start the race. If the starter feels that one of the swimmers has moved, left early or gotten an unfair advantage, the guilty swimmer may be disqualified after the race for a false start. Under USA Swimming rules, one false start disqualifies the swimmer.

The Course

Competition pools may be short course (25 yards or 25 meters), or long course (50 meters). The international standard (as used in the Olympics) is 50 meters. World records are accomplished in 25 and 50 meter pools. USA Swimming maintains records for 25 yard, 25 meter and 50 meter pools.

Teams

USA Swimming is made up of approximately 2,800 teams from all over the country. Of these clubs, nearly half have 80 swimmers or less, and a handful of teams have over 500 swimmers. A team may be comprised of any number of swimmers, parents and coaches.

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. Traditionally recognized age groups are 10 and under, 11-12, 13-14, 15- 16, 17-18. Many local meets feature 8 and under, single age groups, or senior events. Team practice groups are usually determined by age and/or ability.

Rules

The technical rules of swimming are designed to provide fair and equitable conditions of competition and to promote uniformity in the sport. Each swimming stroke has specific rules designed to ensure that no swimmer gets an unfair competitive advantage over another swimmer.

Basics of Officials

Officials are present at all competitions to enforce the technical rules of swimming so 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.

Clerk of the Course (Administration): Arranges the swimmers in their proper heats and lanes prior to a race.

Referee: Has overall authority and control of the competition, ensuring that all the rules are followed; assigns and instructs all officials, and decides all questions relating to the conduct of the meet.

Relay Takeoff Judges: Stand beside the starting blocks to observe the relay exchange ensuring that the feet of the departing swimmer have not lost contact with the block before the incoming swimmer touches the end of the pool.

Timers: Operate timing devices (watches or semi-automatic timing systems) and record the time for the swimmer in their lane. 2 or 3 timers are needed for each lane. This volunteer position offers an ideal opportunity for new parents to work in a swim meet.

Turn Judges: Observe the swimmers from each end of the pool and ensure that the turns and finishes comply with the rules applicable to each stroke.

Starter: Assumes control of the swimmers from the Referee, directs them to "take your mark, and sees to it that no swimmer is in motion prior to giving the start signal.

Stroke Judges: Observe the swimmers from both sides of the pool, walking abreast of the swimmers, to ensure that the rules relating to each stroke are being followed. The positions of Stroke Judge and Turn judge may be combined into one position called the Stroke and Turn Judge.

Swim Meet Procedures

All swimmers are responsible for checking their event information concerning events actually entered, location of meet, and warm-up times on the Berlin Barracudas website.

Any changes to this information will be posted as soon as the information is received.

All swimmers are responsible for their own transportation to and from meets. Each swimmer should arrive at the facility 15-20 minutes prior to the scheduled warm-up. All swimmers must report to the Barracuda coaching staff upon arrival.

Any swimmer selected for a relay should plan on staying to participate in that relay. Selection of swimmers for relay events will be done as quickly as possible following the last applicable events.

Each swimmer should purchase a meet program and make sure their name appears in the events to be swum. If there are any discrepancies, report them to the coach before warm-ups. If “check-in” is not done, the swimmer will be scratched (not allowed to swim) from those events.

Once “checked-in”, write each event number on your swimmer’s hand in ink. This helps them remember what events they are swimming and what event number to listen for.

Items that could be brought to the meet include:

- Most important: team cap and two (2) pairs of goggles
- Towels - your swimmer will be there awhile, so pack at least two (2).
- Something to sit on (i.e. sleeping bag, blanket, lawn chair).
- Team Warm-ups: Pool decks can be cold for a wet athlete.
- T-shirts: bring several, same reason as above.
- Games: travel games, coloring books, reading books, cards, anything to pass the time.
- Food: depending on the meet location, swimmers may be allowed to bring a small cooler. Suggested items to bring - a balance of protein, carbohydrates and fats. NO SUGARS! There is almost always a concession stand available, too.

The coach will tell the swimmers what strokes and yard age to swim during warm-ups. No horseplay or ball play will be tolerated. Sprints will be given in designated sprint lanes toward the end of the warm-up period.

According to USA Swimming rules (insurance purposes), parents are only allowed on deck if 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 coaching staff. They in turn will pursue the matter through the proper channels.

Psyche sheets. A psyche sheet is usually available for sale in the lobby or concession area of the facility. It lists all swimmers in each event, usually in order “seed time”.

When the team entry is sent in, each swimmer and his/her time in that event is listed. If the swimmer(s) is swimming an event for the first time, he/she will be entered as “no-time” or “NT”. A “no-time” swimmer will most likely swim in one of the first heats of the event. It is highly recommended that each family purchase a psyche sheet to help them follow the meet.

When the Meet Starts

A swimmer's event number will be called, usually over a loudspeaker, and he/she will be asked to report to the bullpen. Swimmers should report with their cap and goggles. Generally, girl's events are odd-numbered and boy's events are even-numbered.

1. Swimmers will be responsible for checking their heat number and lane number on the “Heat Sheet” posted in the bullpen.
2. The clerk-of-course or workers in the bullpen will line-up all swimmers by event and take them down to the pool deck in correct order
3. Timers will be at each lane with clipboards. They will have each swimmer's names for that lane for each heat. It is the swimmer's responsibility to report to the correct lane in time for each event.
4. Upon completion of each event, the swimmer should report to the coaching staff. At this time, stroke mechanics, race tactics, and corrections will be made.

Conduct at Swim Meet

The Berlin Barracuda Swim Club will be known by its actions in and out of the pool. Remember that you are representing the Berlin Barracuda Swim Club and United States Swimming.

Unsportsmanlike conduct on the part of any Berlin Barracuda Swim Club Member (athlete, parent, or coach) will be handled in accordance to the policies set forth by USA Swimming, Wisconsin Swimming, and the Berlin Barracuda Swim Club.

Teaching Parents the Principles of Peak Performance By Dr. Alan Goldberg, Competitive Advantage

Most parents who push, or otherwise interfere with the coaching role, do so because they want their child to perform better. They do not understand that their behavior is performance disruptive for their child. By directly teaching coaches to teach parents the principles of peak performance i.e. those elements that will insure high self-esteem, continued enjoyment of the sport and consistent performance - parents will be better equipped to work with coaches and not sabotage their child.

1. **HAVE FUN** - Coaches who consistently make the sport fun produce peak performers. When an athlete has fun, he will perform well. Fun will ensure an athlete's motivation and prevent burn-out. When the fun leaves the sport because of parental pressure, the child will become vulnerable to performance problems. A related concept to teach here is the reason a child plays. The child should compete because he wants to for his goals, not for his parents'. Coaches must be encouraged to explain about the negative, demotivating effects of "bribes" or "bonuses" for certain performance goals.

2. **BUILD HIGH SELF-ESTEEM** - Explain the direct relationship between self-esteem and performance. High self-esteem leads to improved performance while lower self-esteem results in poorer performance. Encourage parents to build self-esteem and not to link a child's self-worth and lovability with how fast he goes or how many games she starts. Encourage parents to "catch their kids doing things right", to focus on the positive.

3. **ENCOURAGE A PROCESS FOCUS VS OUTCOME FOCUS** - One of the biggest causes of "choking" that parents inadvertently contribute to is encouraging an outcome focus in their children. Pre-game thoughts about scoring, beating someone else, or getting a college scholarship all tend to distract the athlete from the game at hand. Parents would not push the outcome so much if they were aware of its detrimental effects on performance. Help them refocus their comments on enjoying the process of training: competing, and playing.

4. **CHALLENGED NOT THREATENED** - Parents who threaten and punish children for not doing well need to understand that these behaviors will hurt their child's performance and sense of self. Fear may produce short-term results, but it has serious long-term consequences. Implicit in a threat is the belief that you do not think the child is capable. Implicit in a challenge (there is nothing to lose should you fail) is a positive belief in the player's ability. Educate parents on the performance effects of threats and how they distract a player's focus, putting them into the future and out of the game they're in. Parents should be encouraged not to use guilt, fear or any kind of threat to motivate their children.

5. **FREE TO FAIL** - Parents need to be taught how to view their child's failure as a positive learning experience rather than as an excuse to demean them. Freedom to fail empowers athletes while the worry of messing up leaves an athlete tied in knots and playing tentatively. Teach parents how to teach this and the other principles by modeling this appropriate behavior. Failure is an opportunity to learn and improve, it is nothing more than feedback and should not have a value judgement placed on it.

6. **AUTOMATIC NON-THINKING** - In every peak performance an athlete is not thinking. They are unconscious and on autopilot. Their focus is in the experience, i.e. feeling the ground, the motion in their limbs, their rhythm, etc. Thinking slows athletes down. Help parents understand that giving their child something to think about is counter-productive. It gets the athlete trying too hard and performing poorly. Teach what pre-game and post-game comments are useful (have fun, relax, you're ready, good job, etc).

7. **RELAXED** - During a peak performance an athlete is relaxed and focused. Any kind of parental comments/pressure will only interfere with this principle.