

Terminology and Acronyms Used in Competitive Swimming

By: Kevin Hogan

The swimming community is no different from any other group in having its own terminology and acronyms. While these terms and acronyms may be well known to those who have been involved in the sport for some time, the terms and acronyms can also serve as a barrier to understanding for those new to the sport. The list below of terms and acronyms is meant to help those new to swimming understand the language, and the organization of the terms and acronyms is meant to provide context to their use. In some cases, words are shown in square brackets to add further context.

The Bottom-to-Top Structure of USA Swimming and How it Fits into the International Sports Community

[Club/Team]	Individual swimmers associate with a particular club/team through which they practice and compete.
LSC	Local Swim Committee — USA Swimming is divided into 58 LSCs, which are geographical territories within the U.S. Every club resides within an LSC. LSCs sanction, approve, observe, oversee, and conduct competitive swimming events within their borders.
[Zone]	Zone is not an acronym, but an organizational structure within USA Swimming. Each LSC is assigned to one of four geographical zones. The zones include the Central Zone (CZ), Eastern Zone (EZ), Southern Zone (SZ), and Western Zone (WZ). Each zone represents the LSCs within their geographical areas and conducts zone-level championship meets.
NGB	National Governing Body — NGBs are authorized through the Ted Stevens Olympic and Amateur Sports Act and function to organize and govern their respective sports.
[USA Swimming]	USA Swimming is the NGB for swimming in the United States. USA Swimming does not use an acronym for its name — USA Swimming should always be spelled out. Additional aquatics-related NGBs include United States Diving, United States Artistic Swimming, USA Water Polo, and United States Masters Swimming.
USAS	United States Aquatic Sports — USAS is the governing body within the United States that represents aquatic sports to World Aquatics. USAS defers primary responsibility for the individual aquatic sports to the NGBs.
USOPC	United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee — The USOPC serves as both the National Olympic Committee (NOC) and National Paralympic Committee (NPC) for the United States. The USOPC is responsible for putting together the teams that represent the United States in the Olympics, Paralympics, Youth Olympics, Pan American, and Parapan American Games.
AQUA	AQUA is World Aquatics, the international federation that governs aquatic sports (swimming, open water swimming, water polo, artistic swimming, and diving). Prior to 2022, AQUA was known as FINA (Fédération Internationale de Natation).

IOC	International Olympic Committee — The IOC is the international organization responsible for organizing the Olympic Games.
[PanAm Aquatics]	PanAm Aquatics is the governing body of aquatic sports in North America, Central America, and South America. It covers the disciplines of artistic swimming, swimming, diving, high diving, water polo, and open water. PanAm Aquatics organizes the Pan American Games and the Junior PanAmerican Games.
Pan-Pacs	Pan Pacific Swimming Championships — International competition that is run in the even year between Summer Olympics. The participating countries originally bordered the Pacific Ocean, but have now expanded to other non-European countries including Brazil and South Africa.

Additional Swimming or Swim-Related Organizations

AAU	Amateur Athletic Union — The AAU promotes and develops amateur sports and physical fitness programs, including swimming. Prior to the establishment of the NGBs, the AAU governed amateur athletics in the U.S.
ASCA	American Swim Coach Association — A coaches' association that provides certification for swim coaches as well as professional development, recognition, and advocacy.
CSCAA	College Swimming Coaches Association of America — CSCAA is the professional organization for college swimming and diving coaches. Its mission is to protect, preserve, and expand college swimming opportunities.
CSOA	College Swimming Officials Association — The mission of the CSOA is to provide college and university swimming programs with the highest level of expertise in officiating.
ISCA	International Swim Coach Association — ISCA provides science-based education for swim coaches and competitive events for swimmers.
NCAA	National Collegiate Athlete Association — The NCAA governs athletic competition, including swimming, at the collegiate level.
NCSA	National Club Swimming Association — The NCSA is an association of swim clubs and coaches that also provides competitive events for swimmers.
NFHS	National Federation of High Schools — The NFHS writes the rules for high school sports, including swimming.
NISCA	National Interscholastic Swim Coaches Association — NISCA is a professional organization that supports high school coaches of aquatic sports.
OKI	Our Kids Initiative — A committee formed in 2000 to bring together leaders from all the governing bodies of swimming to discuss rules differences among the organizations and how the rules might be brought closer together. Rule-making member organizations include AQUA, NCAA, NFHS, USA Swimming, USMS, USPOC, and the YMCA.

	Non-rule-making organizations include ASCA, CSCAA, CSOA, and NISCA.
USMS	United States Masters Swimming — USMS provides support and competitive events for swimmers aged 18 and over.
YMCA	Young Men’s Christian Association — Among its many functions, the YMCA provides competitive opportunities in the sport of swimming. Many USA Swimming clubs are also dual YMCA clubs.

Athlete Protection and Safety

APT	Athlete Protection Training — APT is required annually of all adult members, including adult athlete members, of USA Swimming.
BGC	Background Check – A BGC is required every two years for all adult non-athlete members of USA Swimming.
CPT	Concussion Protocol Training — CPT is required of all coach and official members of USA Swimming. CPT must be done at least once, but some states may impose further requirements, which must be met.
MAAPP	Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policy — USA Swimming has instituted MAAPP to provide a safe environment for its athletes. MAAPP addresses one-on-one interactions; social media and electronic communications; travel (local and team); locker rooms and changing areas; and massages, rubdowns, and athletic training modalities.
USADA	U.S. Anti-Doping Agency — USADA is the national anti-doping organization for the U.S in Olympic, Paralympic, Pan American, and Parapan American sports. USADA manages the anti-doping program, including in-competition and out-of-competition testing, for all USOPC-recognized NGBS, their athletes, and events.
WADA	World Anti-Doping Agency — WADA’s primary purpose is to develop, harmonize, and coordinate anti-doping rules and policies across all sports and countries.

Governance

BOD	Board of Directors — USA Swimming and each LSC are all governed by their own elected BODs. Among the responsibilities of the BODs are setting the strategic direction of the organization; establishing and directing policies, procedures, and programs; providing financial oversight; and ensuring operation within all organizational and legal obligations.
GC	General Chair — The GC leads the LSC BOD.
HOD	House of Delegates — The HOD is a representative body whose membership is specified by the organization’s bylaws. The primary responsibilities of the USA Swimming HOD are to elect the members of the USA Swimming BOD and to vote on legislation, including changes to the rules and regulations governing swimming. Each LSC also has a representative HOD that is charged with establishing the policies, procedures, and programs of the LSC.

NOC	National Officials Committee — The mission of the NOC is to conduct programs to recruit, educate, train, and certify a diverse team of USA Swimming officials to provide the highest quality and consistent officiating for athletes at all levels of swimming.
OC	(1) Officials Chair — The NOC and the officials committee in each LSC are led by an Officials Chair. (2) LSC Officials Committee — LSC Officials Committees implement programs to recruit, educate, train, and certify USA Swimming officials at the LCS level.

USA Swimming Database

OME	Online Meet Entry — OME is used to enter athletes into national-level competition (eg, Futures, Speedo Junior National Championships, TYR Pro Swim Series, National Championships). OME may be optionally used by zones and LSCs to enter athletes into competition such as Speedo Sectional Championships or LSC championships.
OTS	Officials Tracking System — OTS is used to track and manage data relevant to certified swim officials. Specifically, OTS tracks certifications at both the LSC and national levels; testing history; meet participation at the session and position levels; and national evaluation history.
[SWIMS]	SWIMS 3.0 is the database used by USA Swimming to track a variety of information including the following items: athlete and non-athlete membership; times achieved by athletes in sanctioned, approved, and observed competition; APT, CPT, and background check completion; the coaching certification program; and all the components of OTS.

Officiating Positions/Certifications (summary descriptions – refer to the Rulebook for full descriptions)

AO	Administrative Official — An AO can be certified at the LSC and N2 levels. The AO is responsible for the following: supervising the entry and registration process, clerk of course, timing equipment operator, scoring personnel, and other administrative personnel; the accurate processing of entries and scratches; accurate seeding of preliminary, semi-final, and final heats; determination and recording of the official time; determination of the official results; and publication and posting of the results and scores. The AO supervises the CC, CO, TJ, TO, and other administrative personnel.
AR	Administrative Referee — An AR can be certified at the N2 and N3 levels. An AR is a referee who performs the duties of an AO at a prelims-finals meet. The AR should have the experience and knowledge to be able to assume the role of the meet referee any time during the meet, if necessary.
CC	Clerk of Course — The CC position is not certified, but LSCs may provide training. The CC is provided with a list of the names of all swimmers in all events including relay swimmers in the order in which they will swim. If manual seeding is used, the CC assigns heats and lanes. A CC may be used to organize swimmers and escort them to the blocks for their assigned heats.

CJ	Chief Judge — A CJ can be certified at the LSC, N2, and N3 levels. The CJ assigns and supervises the activities of all stroke, turn, place, and take-off judges and may report their decisions.
CO	Computer Operator — The CO position is not certified, but LSCs may provide training. The CO runs the meet management software used to manage the meet.
DR	Deck Referee — A DR can be certified at the LSC, N2, and N3 levels. A DR is a referee who has authority over the deck officials as specified in rule 102.11.
MR	Meet Referee — MR is not a certified position, but the position should be filled by an experienced referee who can oversee the entire swim meet and ensures that all rules and regulations are followed by making final decisions on any procedure, modification, dispute, or protest for a fair and equitable competition.
SR	Starter — A SR can be certified at the LSC, N2, and N3 levels. The SR is responsible for starting each race.
TJ	Timing Judge — The TJ position is not certified, but LSCs may provide training. The TJ, under the supervision of the AO or AR, determines the official time for each swim.
TO/TEO	Timing Equipment Operator — The TO/TEO is not a certified position, but LSCs may provide training. The TO/TEO is responsible for the automatic or semi-automatic timing equipment, including the electronic starting system and scoreboard (if used), and shall advise the referee or AO/AR of any system problems that might affect the accuracy of times or whenever the touchpad is observed to have failed to record the finish when the swimmer completed the race.
TTR	Time Trial Referee — A referee who is in charge of time trials, most often offered as separate sessions at a prelims/finals meet.

Evaluation and Certification Levels

LSC	LSC-level certification is administered by the individual LSCs following the guidelines established by USA Swimming. LSC-level certification is available for ST, CJ, SR, DR, and AO.
N2	The first of two national certification levels; administered by the NOC National Certification Working Group. N2 certification is available for ST, CJ, SR, DR, AO, and AR. Certification at the N2 level requires an N2 evaluation.
N3	The second of two national certification levels; administered by the NOC National Certification Working Group. N3 certification is available for ST, CJ, SR, DR, and AR. Certification as an N3 ST requires an N3 evaluation. All other N3 certifications require both an N3i and an N3f evaluation.
N3i	N3 initial evaluation — not a certification level, but the first of two required evaluations for N3 certification at CJ, SR, DR, and AR.
N3f	N3 final evaluation — not a certification level, but the second of two required evaluations for N3 certification at CJ, SR, DR, and AR.

OQM Officials qualifying meet — a meet that has been approved for N2, N3, N3i, and/or N3f evaluations.

Swim Meet Terms

CTS Colorado Timing System--A brand of timing equipment that can be used for automatic and semi-automatic timing.

DAK Daktronics — A brand of timing equipment that can be used for automatic and semi-automatic timing.

DFS Declared False Start — A DFS is recorded when a swimmer reports to the referee prior to the start of their race and declares their intent not to compete. A DFS counts as a disqualification and can be used in some, but not all, circumstances to avoid a penalty for being a “no show” for an event in which the swimmer has entered.

DQ Disqualification — A DQ occurs when a swimmer or relay team violates one or more rules of swimming. The time and/or place of the swimmer or relay team is not recorded in the results for the event.

LCM Long-Course Meters — 50-meter pool length.

MM Meet Manager — A Hy-Tech software product, commonly used to run swim meets.

NS No Show — A NS occurs when a swimmer does not compete in an event in which they are entered.

[OMEGA] OMEGA is a brand of timing equipment that can be used for automatic and semi-automatic timing.

OW Open Water — OW swimming takes place in rivers, lakes, or oceans.

PNS Penalty No-Show — When a swimmer is barred from swimming in a subsequent event or events due to a no show in an earlier event, the swimmer is said to be a PNS in the subsequent event or events.

RJP Relay Judging Platform —RJP is the brand name of Colorado Time Systems’ automatic relay exchange judging platform, but the acronym is often used generically to refer to the automatic relay exchange platforms of other manufactures. The RJP is used in conjunction with the automatic timing system to determine if a relay swimmer has left the starting platform prior to the incoming swimmer touching the timing pad at the end of the lane.

SCM Short-Course Meters — 25-meter pool length.

SCY Short-Course Yards — 25-yard pool length.

TT Time Trial — An event conducted within or independently of a meet where the swimmer races against the clock to establish an official time.

UN Unattached — The status of a member who does not represent a club or World Aquatics member Federation in competition.

USA Swimming National Championship Series

USA Swimming has organized its national meets into a championship series. The meets are ranked in a hierarchy from one star to five stars. The progression indicates the level of competition for each event, with five stars being the highest level. The hierarchy's purpose is to instill goal setting for athletes to reach the next stage.

1-star	Speedo Sectionals
2-star	Futures Championships
3-star	Speedo Junior National Championships
4-star	TYR Pro Swim Series (PSS), TYR Summer Championships
5-star	National Championships, U.S. Open, trials class meets