

# **PARENTS GUIDE TO COMPETITIVE SWIM MEETS**

## *A guide to understanding and enjoying your child's swim meet*

### **WHAT IS COMPETITION?**

We use swimming as a vehicle to teach children life skills and how to reach their athletic potential. In competition, the most important measure is not who collected the most medals, or even who improved the most. The critical measure is who learned and enjoyed the most from the competitive experience.

Winners are not only the swimmer that comes in first place, but more of who behaves like a winner. There are certain characteristics of a winner, and every swimmer, no matter where they place, has the opportunity to emulate those characteristics: concentration, listening skills, sportsmanship, and working toward a goal.

Swimmers quickly forget the medals, records, and other material benefits. They will however, remember the development of interpersonal skills, discipline, listening skills, time management, goal setting, reaching potential, dedication and enhanced self-image. These are things that make the swimmer a more successful person with a better chance of living a life closer to their peak potential, and to contribute to the world in which they live.

### **WHICH MEETS SHOULD MY CHILD ENTER?**

We will note on the meet information if the meet is for a specific group of swimmers. If there is no specification then the meet is recommended for all athletes. The coaches will also announce at practices prior to meet sign up if their group should attend. In the Developmental Group, each child has different experience level and levels of expectations. If you are new to the sport and are unsure if your athlete is ready to compete, please discuss with your coach.

### **THE DAY OF...**

#### **WHAT TO BRING TO A MEET**

1. Team Suit- If you do not have one- a regular swimmers suit will do. If they plan to compete often a team suit is recommended.
2. Team Swim Cap - given out early season or at the swimmers first meet of the season.
  - \* If the swimmer has short hair and their hair does not cause detriment to the stroke, they do not have to wear a cap.
3. Racing goggles & spare goggles with name on them.
  - \* Racing goggles are tighter than training goggles and can really only be tolerated for the length of the race.
4. At least 2 towels
5. Team t-shirts, sweatshirts, and or parka to wear between events
6. Lawn chairs – some meets provide seating, some do not.
7. You may bring drinks and snacks for your child. Snacks are available for purchase at each meet
8. Highlighter – to be covered later
9. Sharpie Pen and ball point pen– to be covered later
10. Many indoor swimming pool areas may be rather warm and humid, make sure you bring cooler clothes in case you need them.

## **WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU ARRIVE AT A MEET**

1. Look for other team members to establish a team area.
2. Purchase heat sheets from Clerk-of-Course (averages \$5 - \$10).
3. Send your child over to the coach for warm-up. Look for the coach to be behind one of the starting blocks.
4. While child is doing warm-up – locate your child's events in heat sheet.
5. Highlight event, heat number and lane number you child will be swimming (highlighter).
6. Your child will report behind the blocks two to three heats prior to their race to the lane that is in heat sheet.
7. It is the parent's and child's responsibility to see that the child is at the starting block for each event on time.
8. Your child may want to write their events, heat number and lane numbers on their legs or arms. This is done just after warm-up and prior to start of the meet. (Sharpie Pen)
9. Meet announcer will make announcements for each event. They will also announce last call for a particular event. Please make sure you are listening to send your child down on time.
10. If your child is not on the starting block upon the call for their heat, they will be prohibited from swimming that event. Send them to their lane when they are young or new, but then allow them to take this responsibility as they become more experienced. Parents are not allowed behind the starting area or the coaches' area.
11. Parents are not allowed to talk directly to an official, if they have a problem understanding an infraction they should communicate with the coach as long as it doesn't interfere with the coaching of an athlete.

## **THE MEET**

1. Check meet entry sheet for warm-up times. Please arrive 15 minutes prior to warm-up start so your child will be ready to get in the water by warm-up time.
2. If you are registered for a meet and cannot attend, please notify the coach by phone or voicemail.
3. On the day of the meet or evening before meet starts, if you find you will not be attending, please notify another parent as soon as possible and ask them to inform the coach.
4. If your child is more than 30 minutes late for meet warm-up, he or she will not be entered in a relay.
5. There will be a team meeting for the swimmers directly after warm-up. Relays will be announced.
5. If relays are at the end of the meet, please make sure you do not leave before checking the relay assignment.
6. There is no refund for not attending a meet.

## **ONCE YOUR CHILD HAS SWUM THEIR EVENT**

1. Timers will give your child their time and at most meets the times will be electronically posted.
2. We expect swimmers to remember their times, review their times posted and log their times.
3. Immediately after they have swum, they need to go talk to the Coach first.
4. When your child talks to the Coach after they swim, the coaches will discuss their performance and offer them constructive criticism, positive encouragement and technical advice.
5. DQ or Disqualification – When a swimmer does not swim the stroke technically correct, the official will tell the child when he or she gets out of the water that they were disqualified. Developmental swimmers are frequently disqualified. Parents and children should look at this as a learning experience. As their stroke techniques improve, their frequency of disqualification will drop. Even our more experienced swimmers will occasionally be disqualified.
6. Remember your responsibilities as a parent is to make sure your child knows that win or lose, scared or heroic-you love him/her, appreciate their efforts, and are not disappointed in them. This will allow them to do their best without fear of failure. Be the person in their life that they can look to for constant positive reinforcement.

7. Allow the coach the opportunity to coach. Relationship between the swimmer and coach is most important. When a parent interferes with the coach's opinion as to how the swimmer should swim or train, it causes considerable and oftentimes insurmountable confusion as to whom the swimmer should listen to. Remember, the coach is a trained professional in the sport and holds the knowledge necessary to allow your child to become the best athlete possible. If you have a problem or concern, please contact the coach away from the meet so you may discuss your concern.

## **BEFORE LEAVING THE MEET**

1. Check relay assignment
2. Clean area
3. Thank your coaches and let them know you are leaving

## **OUT OF TOWN MEETS**

Out of town travel meets are a great opportunity for teammates to build deeper friendships, and to race other competitors they may not know. It also allows them to learn how to handle a new environment. We encourage our athletes to enjoy this aspect of the sport. Each parent is responsible for their child's travel to and from swim meets as well as for overnight accommodations.

In situations where a parent is unable to attend a meet with their child, the parent is responsible for making arrangements with another parent to take their child to the meet and to serve as that child's chaperone. It is suggested that the chaperoned athlete offers to share a percent of the expenses with the chaperone.

1. Hotel reservations are the individual's responsibility.
2. There will be a team hotel listed with the travel meet information. Many of the hotels fill early, so check your travel schedule, and make reservations as soon as you are able to.

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

1. Deck Entry – if you have not previously entered your child into an event or a meet, you may be able to deck enter your child - if space is available. You will have to check with the Clerk-of Course at that meet for availability. The average cost of deck entry per meet is double the normal entry fee, plus meets surcharges.
2. If your child is hesitant to swim an event that he/she has previously entered, please have him/her discuss with Coach prior to the event.
3. Relays – at most meets there are two types of relays per age group. There is a freestyle relay and a medley relay. In a freestyle relay the swimmers only swim freestyle. In a medley relay the swimmers will swim a particular stroke. This will be Backstroke, Breaststroke, Butterfly and Freestyle in that order. The Coach will determine who will participate in the relay and assign the stroke and order.
4. If you have any questions that have not been answered here, please do not hesitate to ask your Coach, Board Members or another parent.
5. Per Arkansas Swimming Inc. rules, parents are not allowed to go behind starting blocks or timers. If the meet is determined as "closed deck" they are not allowed on deck.
6. Swimming is a team effort. Please cheer on other Dolphin-Laser swimmers, sit with the team, and wear your Team t-shirt.
7. Encouragement – please stay positive no matter what your child's performance may be. Swimmers tend to be very self-critical and they know when they have not turned in a good performance.
8. Please do not approach the Coach during swim events, as this is their busiest time.
9. Final results for each event will be posted outside of pool area at the meet by Swim Officials. We encourage you and your child to keep a log of your child's best times from each meet. This helps the athlete take responsibility for their performances. You may also look up your child's results on the team website, after the event.
10. Please encourage your child to pick up trash around the team rest area and thank the volunteers.

## **GET INVOLVED**

### **AT THE MEET**

Almost all officials, meet directors and timers are parents who choose to get involved and volunteer their time. We encourage you to assist them in timing or other needs they may call for. If you are interested in becoming an official, express your interest to Coach Tay or swim parent, Jeff Bish. Please make sure you thank the timers, meet officials and coaches for their time and energy. Also help your child clean up the team area. This shows respect for the host team for taking the time to provide this opportunity for your child.

### **WHEN IT'S OUR TURN TO HOST A MEET**

We host several meets a year at UALR, LRRRC, and Jacksonville. It takes every parent to volunteer in some way to provide this racing opportunity for our athletes. Mark your calendar and be able to help out. Please make sure you “pitch in” when asked.

## **OTHER INFORMATION YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT COMPETITIVE SWIMMING**

### **PHILOSOPHY OF COMPETITION:**

Winning ribbons, medals and trophies is not the main goal. Even if a swimmer wins first but did not do his/her best, we try to teach that *athlete improvement, learning, and enjoying the competition is the goal*. If a swimmer had a bad swim, it is important that you as a parent let the child know that you still love them regardless of the performance. Try to point out the positive aspects of the race, do not emphasize the negative. It is the coach's job to give the athlete the constructive criticism of the race. Help your child overcome the disappointment. It is important that the child does not dwell on the bad swim but can let go and not let one bad swim affect the rest.

One of the greatest rewards a swimmer can achieve is to *learn from each competition*. There are many lessons that can be learned if the swimmer is aware. We as coaches encourage the swimmer to learn from each racing opportunity. This skill will continue with the athlete long after their competitive swimming career is over.

### **WHAT IS EXPECTED OF OUR SWIMMERS?**

We teach our athletes that their *competition is an opportunity to be challenged* to reach their greatest potential as a swimmer. They should be grateful for the chance to improve in a challenging situation. We do not believe a swimmer should try to beat a specific person; this sets them up for failure in the long run. They should simply look at each racing situation as an opportunity to be pushed to a greater level.

Swimmers are expected to *act in a sportsmanlike manner*. The coaches teach the child how to behave like a champion when the swimmer has a “great” or “bad” swim. Respect for officials & coaches, congratulating others, encouragement of teammates, discipline of efforts, and mature attitudes are examples of behaviors praised and rewarded.

Swimmers are prepared and expected to *compete in all swimming events, distances, and strokes*. This encourages versatility and encourages the swimmer to explore his potential in the wide range of events offered. Often a swimmer's “best” stroke will change season to season as their body matures and technique is learned.

The Dolphin-Laser Swim Team has a lot of *team pride* as being a team with direction and purpose. Therefore at competitions all swimmers should sit together, cheer for one another, be in team uniform and act as a team.

When there is a system of *presenting awards* at a meet, it is a Dolphin- Lasers duty to be prompt and to cooperate fully and with dignity and respect at the presentations. The team uniform is to be worn when accepting an award. Politeness and a modest thank you are to be exhibited when receiving the award. It is appropriate to congratulate other swimmers and receive the same with poise and a “thank you”. If photos are being taken, we ask the swimmer to remain until the shooting is complete. Do not ham it up; the picture may be special to someone else. The image a swimmer presents is a direct reflection of the team as a whole.

## **WHAT IS USA Swimming?**

USA Swimming is the National governing body for amateur competitive swimming in the United States. At its headquarters located at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado, the USA Swimming staff interacts with 59 Local Swimming Committees (LSC’s), athletes, coaches and volunteers at all levels to provide a variety of services to 236,000 registered athletes, 24,800 non-athletes, and 2759 swim clubs.

USA Swimming was conceived in 1978 with the passage of the Amateur Sports Act which decreed that all Olympic Sports would be administered independently. Prior to this Act, USA Swimming was the Competitive Swimming Committee of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) located in Indianapolis, Indiana. USA Swimming headquarters were moved to Colorado Springs in 1981.

As the National Governing Body for the sport, USA Swimming is charged with the responsibility to formulate rules, conduct national championships, disseminate safety and sports medicine information, select competitors to represent this country in international competition, insure the development of its’ member clubs and age group swimmers.

Revenues of the USA Swimming budget come from registration dues from athletes and membership fees from non-athletes and clubs, corporate sponsorship, United States Olympic Committee development funds, event income, publications, and promotional merchandise.

Athletes must pay a registration fee to compete in USA Swimming sanctioned meets. Athletes receive a membership card and have both liability and secondary medical insurance coverage and Splash magazine. This fee is covered in your yearly or joining registration fee.

## **USA SWIMMING LEVELS OF ACHIEVEMENTS**

There are seven different age group classifications: 8 & under, 10 & under, 11-12, 13-14, 15-16, 17-18, and senior. The senior classification includes any age registered swimmer who has achieved a prescribed qualifying time for the event. Not all age group classifications are offered at every meet. The swimmers age on the first day of the meet will govern the swimmers age for the entire meet.

Within each age group there are different nationally recognized levels of achievement based on times. All swimmers begin as “C” swimmers. As they improve they advance from “C” to “B”, “BB”, “A”, “AA”, “AAA”, “and AAAA”. The times required for each ability level are published each year by United States Swimming. This permits fair, yet challenging, competition on all levels. Some swim meets set certain qualifying standards. In order to swim in certain classification, a swimmer must have achieved the qualifying time for that particular classification.

## **TYPES OF MEETS**

- 1.) Developmental Meets-** These meet generally do not have qualifying times. Most of the time they offer each one of the competitive strokes in the two distances offered for each age group. Each swimmer is usually allowed to enter 5 events per day. Most are just one day meets.
- 2.) Invitational** – These are usually open meets for swimmers of all levels and abilities.
- 3.) Qualification Meets** - These meets have some type of qualification time standards that a swimmer must achieve before entering the meet.
- 4.) State Championships-** At the end of each short course (winter) and long course (summer) Arkansas Swimming Inc. host the Arkansas State Championships. To participate in this meet in the state of Arkansas a swimmer must achieve a qualifying time standard. Time standards are usually “BB” in the spring and between “B” and “BB” in the summer. However these may change year to year.

**5.) Zone Championship** - Zones is held after the State Championship meet in the summer. Arkansas is a member of the Central Zone. A swimmer must achieve an “AAA” time standard to participate. All swimmers from Arkansas compete as one - Team Arkansas. Swimmers compete within their age bracket.

**6.) Sectionals/ Region VIII** - Sectionals is a qualifying meet held toward the end of each season. The United States is divided up into 14 Regions. Arkansas is a member of Region Eight. It includes Missouri Valley, Oklahoma, and Ozark as well as Arkansas. Swimmers compete against each other regardless of age.

**8.) Junior Nationals**- this competition is for swimmers age 18 and under that have achieved a certain time standard. They compete against athletes across the Nation.

**9.) Phillip 66/ USA National Championship ( Senior Nationals)** - Other than the Olympic Trials and the World Championship Trials, each of which is held every four years, Seniors is the highest level of competition. Competition is held with the fastest swimmers in the Nation regardless of their age.

*We hope you and your child will enjoy the competitive experience, realize it will take several years to  
Learn all about our sport, be patient, ask questions but most of all relax and have fun with it.*