

A Few Suggestions on
WHAT TO EXPECT AT SWIM MEETS

By Jessica Vipperman
Head Age Group Coach, Sun Devil Aquatics

Starting out with a year round swim program can be a bit like stepping onto foreign soil for the first time, the sport has a language and a culture all of its own. And deciphering it can be a bit like looking at Homer's Odyssey written in Greek. Even though there is a lot of information out there, we often don't know what questions to ask to help increase our understanding of the ins and outs (or the basics) of our sport. The following is a general guide to help wade you through the waters of your first few swim meets as a Sun Devil Parent.

“Commit” or “Un-Commit”- that is the question. The first step in getting to swim meets is deciding which meets your swimmer is available for. You'll find the season's meet schedule on the MEETS/EVENTS tab on our website. Under each meet is an option to “attend this meet”. If you plan on attending the meet, you need to do nothing with this. Your swimmer is automatically signed up to compete unless you tell us otherwise by the deadline indicated for that specific event.

So, you thought she was a freestyler. As a swimmer progresses through their career, they will excel at a variety of skills at different times. Our program at SDA is designed to create well rounded, versatile, young swimmers. Freestyle may be her favorite stroke this week. But that doesn't mean she will only swim that at meets. Coaches will always select events for swimmers to compete in during meets. Event selection is determined by an athlete's age, ability, and practice performance. The first step in being a great swim parent is developing trust for the coaches as professionals. And as professionals, they will make professional, educated decisions about what she is ready to swim and when she is ready to swim it.

The Five W's and the Meet Flyer. It's the night before the meet and suddenly you find yourself wondering “When do we have to be at the meet”, “Who else will be in this meet?”, “Where is this pool located?” You are fumbling for your coach's phone number and your swimmer says “it's all on the meet flyer, mom”. Meet flyers, or the Magna Carta for that meet, can be found on the website under the MEETS/EVENTS tab. The meet flyer will tell you where the meet is (address), when its starts, what the order of events is, if concessions are available at this meet, if it's a closed deck or open deck (see “Separate but Equal”), who is hosting the meet, and a plethora of other information.

Be Prepared. Just like the Boy Scouts are prepared for “any old thing”, swim parents should be also. Goggle straps never break at home, it always seems to happen minutes before the race your swimmer is most worried about. Swim caps run away, sun block is a necessity (even in winter), multiple towels are strongly encouraged. Healthy snacks, plenty of fluids and clothing appropriate for the weather are all must haves. “When I was a kid” a deck of cards was a great way to keep yourself entertained in between races, plan on bringing books, games etc. to keep kids entertained during the longer meets.

Parents should help their swimmers know which races they are competing in that day. You can access this info from the website, under the specific meet (or from your coach's email). It's a good idea to write

their events on their hands, and later they can write the heat and lane for those events on their hands. That way- when they are on the way to the blocks and they get distracted by the snack bar, they have an instant reminder of where they were going and why.

15 Minutes Early is on Time. It's happened to everyone before. You walk on deck, at 7am on the dot- the published warm up time you found on the meet flyer- and the team is in the water for warm ups already and your swimmer's coach tells you you're late. You look at your watch; you look at your coach, and again at your watch. Hmmm. SDA swimmers should plan on arriving at meets 15 minutes before the published warm up time. This gives the swimmers time to "settle in", stretch as a team, prepare for warm ups, adjust goggles, discover that they forgot their cap, etc. Warm-ups for meets get crowded, and we are a large team. In order to warm up as a team, we need to be ready to go as soon as the pool is open. We are jumping into the warm up pool at the published warm up time.

Programs, Programs, Get your Programs. At each meet, parents will have the opportunity to purchase programs or heat sheets. These are essential in following the events and knowing when your swimmer is going to race. Borrowing programs from coaches may seem like an economical and convenient way to go- but not for the coach. By the time a swimmer gets to group 2, they are no longer escorted to the blocks. Help them be accountable for their swimming by looking up their assigned heat and lane in the program.

Where, O Where Should my Swimmer Be? When in doubt, they should be 1 of 2 places: in the designated team area or behind the blocks preparing to race. This is especially important for Group 1 swimmers as the "wrangler" is helping them get to the right place at the right time. If it's a closed deck meet, and parents are in the stands, we ask kids to minimize their trips to see their parents- again, not because we don't like you, but because meets for young swimmers tend to move fast and this ensures everyone gets to the right place at the right time.

Separate But Equal. Most meets that your swimmer participates in will be "closed deck meets". (This will often be stated in the meet flyer.) This means that only swimmers, coaches, officials, and meet volunteers are allowed on deck and parents must stay in the designated areas (usually, the stands when available). As warm up comes to an end, parents and spectators will be asked to leave the deck and head to the stands. It's not because no one wants you around. The deck can get quite busy. Managing the number of people on deck helps swimmers get to their races on time, enables volunteers and officials to run the meet smoothly, and helps coaches do the coaching. Your swimmer can come up and visit you- if and only if there is a reasonable amount of time in between their events. If you find yourself wandering the deck looking for space, and the meet marshal asks you to head to the stands, it's nothing personal- your swimmers will be looked after and cared for- it just enables everyone to do their jobs a little bit better....and enables you to have a bird's eye view of the races.

The Crown Jewels- Relays. Throughout the season, at various meets, swimmers will have the opportunity to represent SDA on relays. Relays are an exciting and important part of our sport. They provide an opportunity for teammates to compete together, and are worth double the points of individual events. Our team has a rich tradition of excelling especially in relays as our 13-14 girls have held National Records.

During the season relays will be made up of the fastest combination of four swimmers that are available for the meet. As championship season approaches, we will ask for swimmers to be available for relays even if they aren't qualified for the individual events in a meet. For example, all group 3 swimmers are expected to be available for our State Championship meet as a relay participant if needed. These relays will still be made up of the fastest combination of 4 swimmers. And this decision is made by our coaching staff. There are times when a swimmer set to participate in the "A" relay (the fastest one) is

moved to the “B” relay the day of the race. This happens when the “B” swimmer out-performs the “A” swimmer in the same event.

DQ is not for Dairy Queen. Personal success in our sport is measured by the amount of time a swimmer drops throughout the season in their races. Developmental swimmers have a slightly different task. While dropping time is fun, and so is getting ribbons (especially the blue ones!) demonstrating “legal” strokes is the most important aspect of a Group 1 swimmer. As swimmers learn new skills, and refine those skills, coaches expect that from time to time a swimmer will be disqualified (or DQ’ed). It’s nothing to lose sleep over, for you or the swimmer. It’s a normal part of a developmental swimmers career.

In practice, coaches work hard to teach swimmers concepts. But, like other disciplines, each swimmer has a different learning curve. A disqualification is not a reflection of a coach’s ability to coach, or a swimmers ability to learn, or even still an Officials ability to officiate. They, like anything else, provide us with an opportunity to learn how to improve.

Mind Your Ps and Qs. Speaking of what happens if your swimmer gets DQed....please keep in mind that coaches are here to teach your swimmer, not to watch them fail. Also, our Officials are trained Volunteers. They also want to see your child succeed; the best way to help them improve is to let them know when they’ve done something illegal. No one has a vendetta against your swimmer. We all see exuberant fans at baseball games yelling at the umpire for a bad call, or yelling at the coach for pulling out the pitcher at the “wrong” time. As entertaining as that may be for on lookers in that venue, there is no place for that kind of behavior at a USS swim meet. In certain cases, the Meet Marshalls may even ask “that guy” to leave the pool. If you have a question about why a call was made, talk to the coach (after the meet) in a calm and rational way and they will be more than willing to explain the situation to you.

Devils Bleed Maroon and Gold. Just imagine what would happen if Steve Nash walked onto the court at the next suns game with a Celtics jersey on. Not only would the crowd boo him, I’m sure his coach would have some questions for him. Team uniforms are a reflection of your team pride, they communicate to other teams who you represent, and all SDA swimmers are required to wear the appropriate uniform. This consists of the following: SPEEDO brand team suits, team cap, appropriate colored SDA shirts, Parkas in the winter months, and Speedo brand Devils warm-ups. All of these items can be purchased at our dealer (see “SDA Equipment” tab on our website”).