

Dummy's Guide' To Swim Meets for New Swim Team Parents: Just The Basics

-Written by a true dummy who thought Puppy Chow is dog food, but later learned through Swim Team that it also is a snack food made with cereal, peanut butter and chocolate that is traditionally served at swim meet concession stands. Who knew?

Twelve things to consider when PLANNING FOR THE SWIM MEET:

1. Bring some cash. You may be charged admission as a spectator (usually under \$5 per head); you may not. It depends on the meet. Most meets also sell "heat sheets", which are a kind of program for the swim meet. More on that later. It can be helpful to go ahead and get one, especially for your first meet, so you can decide whether or not it's useful to you for future meets.
2. Bring a Sharpie marker, a pen or pencil to write times on the heat sheet, and a highlighter. You also may want a clipboard for your heat sheet. More on what to do with the Sharpie, pen and highlighter later.
3. Spectator seating at swim meets is usually in bleachers. If you want some cushioning or back support, you'll most likely need to bring yourself a stadium seat.
4. Don't plan for your swimmer to sit with your family. Swimmers belong with their teams during the meet.
5. Don't plan on going over to where the team is sitting to visit with your swimmer. Only coaches, timers, officials and swimmers are allowed "on deck" (the area around the pool and where the swimmers are getting ready to swim) at meets.
6. If you want to take pictures, keep in mind that the flash from cameras interferes with the timing equipment, so flash photography is definitely not permitted at starts. (It's a good idea to figure out how to avoid using a flash during the whole meet, to keep it simple.)
7. Swimmers need to stay hydrated and fed during meets. Pack protein and high-quality carbs, not junk- those bodies are working hard. Water bottles are necessary.
8. Concessions are available at most meets. (That cash comes in handy again!)
9. You may be walking on wet tile floors; wear shoes that will help keep you sure-footed. Keep that in mind for your swimmer(s), too.
10. It can get pretty warm and humid at meets, even mid-winter. Wearing layers is a good idea. Even better: wear layers in SSC colors (red and black)! Your swimmer needs to have warm-up clothes to wear between their swim events, too. Don't forget a towel (maybe even 2)!

11. Be prepared for quite a bit of down time between events. If you have children or other folks who need to be entertained, you may wish to have sleeping bags or blankets for them to sit on out in the hallway, behind the bleachers, etc. away from the bleachers, and appropriate “keep them busy because you can’t give them away” activities on hand. Plan for needing more entertainment than you think.

12. IF YOU ARE GOING TO BE LATE OR CAN’T MAKE IT TO THE MEET FOR WHATEVER REASON: Let the coach know if you can’t make the meet after you’ve signed up.

ONCE YOU ARE AT THE MEET- Getting ready for the meet to start:

1. Punctuality is a virtue. Coach Kent will send out an email a couple of days before the meet with warm up times. Please plan to arrive 15 minutes before the scheduled warm up time. This is so your swimmer will have time to mark their events, find a place for their bag, and get ready to get in the water. The coach will decide if the swimmers will be swimming the entire warm-up period or for a shorter time; whatever the decision by the coach, swimmers should be available to swim when warm-ups begin.

2. Meets are generally divided into morning and afternoon sessions. Morning start times are much more dependable than afternoon start times: afternoon starts often depend on when the morning session wraps up. Be prepared to hang loose a bit if your swimmer is participating in the afternoon session. Also be prepared to be a bit flexible about when the morning session ends... sometimes things can run late.

3. OK, back to that heat sheet and the highlighter. Heat sheets list the individual swim events, the participants in each event, what heat they are in, what lane each swimmer will occupy, and if the swimmer has a history of swimming that event, what his/her previous best time swimming in that event was. To keep track of when your kid is swimming, going through the heat sheet and highlighting each of your swimmer’s events can be useful.

4. Now for the Sharpie marker. Swimmers don’t have heat sheets, so how do they keep track of what events they are swimming in? By writing on themselves, of course. (Again, who knew?) Each swimmer will need to have on their arm or leg a grid showing the event number, the heat number, the lane number, and the stroke/distance. Using a waterproof marker is kind of important to this process. The example below has the swimmer participating in 2 events. In event 22, heat 3, lane 4, she will be swimming the 50 freestyle. In event 35, she will be swimming in the first heat in lane 2 for the 200 individual medley. The swimmer can keep track of what event number is in progress by watching the scoreboard.

E	H	L	S
22	3	4	50Fr
35	1	2	200IM

DURING THE MEET:

1. Since we're on the topic of office supplies: The purpose of the pen or pencil is to record the time your swimmer achieves in each event they swim on the heat sheet. Your swimmer can use this information to assess their performance in the meet. The scoreboard will show lane number and time.
2. Be prepared for hearing that your swimmer has "DQ'd": disqualified. The people you see walking around the pool with clipboards wearing white shirts and navy bottoms are swim meet officials. One of their jobs is to make sure the swimmers follow the rules, such as swimmers only are to use dolphin kicks during butterfly events, that the swimmers actually use the correct stroke (i.e. no freestyle during a breast stroke event); the proper turns are performed at the end of the pool, etc. When a swimmer is disqualified, this means the swimmer is not eligible for an award in that event, and their time is not recorded. Usually an official will tell them when they get out of the water and try to explain what happened. Hearing that they have DQ'd can be really tough news, especially for a new swimmer. The coaches are great at handling this when it happens.
3. On that topic of swim team folks being good people.... The parents/spectators also have a habit that I find admirable. When a swimmer is really hanging in there and finishes their event, they make sure to applaud the effort of the swimmer, especially for those who struggle to finish. What really impressed me at my daughter's first meet is that the parents & other spectators did this for all the kids, regardless of team. That recognition can mean a lot when a kid may not be feeling great for coming in dead last half a pool length behind the next-to-last person.
4. Cheering on your swimmer and their teammates: No, your swimmer probably can't hear you cheering them on while they are swimming. It doesn't matter. Cheer them on anyhow! Keeping the team's energy pumping is a good thing. Remember that the swimmers need to be able to hear at the start though, so shhhh at the start, then go ahead and show them your support!
5. Awards: At each meet, there are different awards structures. All finishers above a certain place may receive ribbons; those in the top may get medals. Usually a parent volunteer from SSC will pick up the awards and bring them back to the pool where you can pick them up at practice.
6. So how do you know where your swimmer placed in an event? Results are usually posted out in a hallway on the wall after events.