

What is Long Course, What is Short Course?

“One of our pools is 25 yards wide by 50 meters long. Why isn't the pool 25 meters by 50 meters or 25 yards by 50 yards?”

For years the "American Standard Short Course" pool has been a 25 yard pool. Almost all high school pools and most college pools are 25 yards long and most high school and college meets are run as short course meets. USA Swimming Club teams generally swim short course meets from September through March.

The international standard is meters. The Olympics, Pan-American Games, and World Championships are held in 50 meter pools. In this country, most 50 meter pools are outdoors due to the cost of building an indoor 50 meter pool. For that reason our long course season is generally from March through August. As more and more indoor 50 meter pools are being built and as the United States focuses more on international swimming the distinction between the "short course season" and the "long course season" becomes less distinct and more meets are going to the long course standard throughout the year -- with the exception of high school and college swimming which will generally remain short course yards.

At this time (April) many teams are training short course but are preparing to go to long course when the outdoor pool is ready. Some lucky teams are located in a climate and have access to long course pools all year around. And some lucky teams have indoor 50 meter water all year around.

Eventually we all will be at swim meets during the spring and summer that are long course. This will cause some confusion about times. The times will be slower because a 50 meter swim is approximately 5 yards longer than a 50 yard swim. Another factor are turns. There are less turns in long course swimming and generally, turns are faster than swimming -- we can push off the wall faster than we can swim. (Although for some of our swimmers who have not yet mastered a turn, the turning process is slower than swimming!)

Some people attempt to "convert" a short course time to a long course time or visa versa. The conversion factors are not precise due to differences in turns, strokes, and individual's ability to swim the extra distance at speed. Conversions can lead to unrealistic expectations and disappointments, or to a false sense of achievement. For those reasons we do not convert times. We simply say that each swimmer has two sets of best times, one for long course and one for short course.