



A Guide To USA Swimming Meets With T2 Aquatics

Swim Meet Basics

Attending a swim meet can be very exciting and hectic. Understanding everything that happens at a swim meet will certainly reduce some anxiety from both the swimmer and the parents. Swim meets are a great opportunity for athletes to spend time with other athletes as well as parents to bond with other parents during away meets as well or while volunteering together during home meets.

Swim meets provide an opportunity for kids to showcase their swimming. After all, they've been practicing for weeks — now it's time to strut their stuff! Swim meets also give coaches a chance to see where they need to go in future practices. The coach can evaluate each swimmer's skills and determine what more needs to be addressed to further improve those skills.

Swim meets are offered every three to six weeks and are usually swum in a 25 yard and 50 meter pools. The swim year is generally divided into two seasons:

- Short Course meets which are swum in 25 yard pools (Sept – March)
- Long Course meets which are swum in 50 meter pools (April – August)

USA Swimmers will compete in their age category, against their gender, based on how old they are on the first day of the meet. This means that a swimmer may change age group designations in the middle of the season and will start competing against the higher age group at their very next meet. The most common age group categories are:

- 8 and under
- 9-10
- 11-12
- 13-14
- Open (Generally 15&Older)

USA Swim Meets usually take place over weekends, often starting on Friday evening. Saturday and Sunday competitions start in the morning and typically run into the afternoon. To control the length of the meet, swimmers are limited to how many events they can compete in each day – typically three or four per day (excluding relays). Be sure to check the meet information to determine at what time your child might be swimming (they sometimes vary). Sometimes in the meet information it states that the afternoon warm up session will start 45-60 minutes after the end of the morning session. Generally the team receives a more specific time for these warm ups 2-5 days before the first day of the meet – so stay tuned for those more specific updates. You can expect a session to last about 4 hours from warm-ups to the final heat (again, depending on the number of swimmers and events offered).

Meet Goals

During the course of the season, coaches work with swimmers on age appropriate technical aspects of competing. It is critical for the swimmer's development that he/she be able to apply those aspects during competition, not just at practice, if he/she is going to be able to swim at their full potential at the end of season championship meet. Unlike summer league swimming, swim meets leading up to the season championship meet are not focused on “winning” and “placing” but rather on technical improvement. Technical improvements result in faster swimming, but not always right away. Swimming fast is important, but so are technique, endurance, and race strategy.

Meet Information – Before The Meet

- Check the meet page on the T2 website and Florida Swimming Website for more information about the meet.
- List of which groups are attending which meets is posted on the meets page.
- You can see the details of the meet in the meet announcement or meet notice including the dates, pool address, warm up times, and to find out which events are on which day.
- Meet entries are emailed out to families in a PDF – check that against the meet notice to see which events are at which session.
- Hotel Information is posted on our meets page.

Swim Meet Necessities

- Swimsuit, team cap, and goggles. Having an extra suit, extra cap and an extra pair of goggles packed is always a good idea. These items seem to rip and break at the most inopportune time.
- Towels – wet bodies are everywhere so pack at least two.
- Chairs – depending on the pool facilities, you may or may not need them, but it's a good idea to have them in your vehicle. Most facilities have bleacher-style seats. You may bring a stadium seat if you really want to sit back. T2 Athletes sit with the team so we may sit on a bleacher, or just a section of the pool deck. Be ready for either situation.
- Team Required Meet Shirt
- Sunscreen.
- Several changes of clothes such as sweatpants, sweatshirts, and t-shirts. Swimmers need to stay warm between events and there is nothing worse than pulling on cold, soggy sweatpants. A T2 Aquatics team parka is an excellent way for the swimmer to stay warm while looking sharp in the winter months. Also a good idea to bring a change of clothes for the swimmer to leave in as many swimmers shower after the meet (they will also need another dry towel for this).
- Small cooler of healthy snacks and drinks. Suggestions for items to bring: Water, Gatorade, granola bars, fruit, yogurt, cereal, trail mix, sandwiches. There is usually a snack bar, but they may not offer appropriate selections, or selections your child enjoys.
- Most importantly – a POSITIVE attitude to pass on to your swimmer(s) along with a lot of encouragement!

Heat & Lane Assignments

Swimmers compete in their age category, against their gender, in the order of the event numbers. Girls for a given age group and event usually compete before the boys. Swimmers are organized into “heats” and lane assignments based on their entry time for that event.

Heat and lane assignments are posted on deck for the swimmers on the “heat sheet” or “program” before the start of the meet. Swimmers will learn how to track where we are in the meet and when they should go line up behind the blocks. An older or more experienced swimmer is a great person to be friends with so they can help out. Of course coaches will help the younger and more inexperienced athletes as well. Some teams write events/heats/lanes on their arms or on small pieces of paper. Many times this hinders the process more than it helps. Event numbers often skip around and sometimes events can be very long, or very short. Athletes will learn to see what is coming up before their event by looking at the full program. By looking at the full program, we teach the athletes to look in front of their event. They will be able to see that the event numbers skip and be able to adjust when they go behind the blocks and hopefully will be calm and ready to swim well!

Before the Meet Starts

1. Arrive at the pool at least 15 minutes before the scheduled warm-up time begins. This time will be listed in the Meet Announcement and emailed to you by the coach.
2. Upon arrival find the T2 Aquatics team. T2 sits together as a team. Parents usually sit in a designated “Spectators” area.
3. The swimmer takes their bag over to the team area and checks in with the Coaches.
4. Swimmers should get his/her cap and goggles ready and wait for warm-up instructions. It is very important for all swimmers to warm-up with the team. Swimmer's bodies are just like cars on a cold day-he/she needs to get the engine going and warmed-up before he/she can go all out.

5. After warm-up, your swimmer will go back to the team area where his/her towels are and sit there until the next event is called. This is a good time to make sure he/she goes to the bathroom if necessary, gets a drink, or just gets settled in.
6. The meet will usually start about 10-15 minutes after warm-ups are over.
7. According to USA Swimming rules (because of insurance purposes), parents are not allowed on deck unless they are serving in an official capacity. Similarly, all questions concerning meet results, an officiating call, or the conduct of a meet, should be referred to the coaching staff. They, in turn, will pursue the matter through the proper channels.
8. Heat Sheets. A heat sheet is usually available for sale in the lobby or concession area of the pool. It lists all swimmers in each event in order of "seed time". When the team entry is sent in, each swimmer and his/her previous best time in that event is listed. If the swimmer is swimming an event for the first time, he/she will be entered as a "no-time" or "NT". A "no-time" swimmer will most likely swim in one of the first heats of the event.

Meet Starts

1. It is important for any swimmer to know what event numbers he/she is swimming. They should know the event numbers from the entries sent out by the coaches. They can find the heat and lane that they are in by looking at the "heat sheet" or "program" in the team area. He/she may swim right away after warm-up or they may have to wait awhile.
2. Swimmers will watch the event numbers on the scoreboard or listen for announcements and report to the blocks prior to their event.
3. The announcer or referee will signal the swimmers to get on the starting block with a series of whistles. The Starter will then ask the swimmers to "take their mark" and a buzzer will sound when to take off. You can expect at least 4-8 heats of each event.
4. The swimmer swims their race.
5. After each swim:
 - a) The swimmer should ask the timers what their time was.
 - b) Swimmers should then go immediately to their coach. The coach will ask him/her their time and discuss the swim with each swimmer.
 - c) Generally, the coach follows these guidelines when discussing swims:
 - a. Positive comments or praise
 - b. Suggestions for improvement
 - c. Positive comments
 - d) The coach will then recommend that the swimmer go sit back down, or possibly go and warm down. Under no circumstances should the swimmers be "playing" in the warm up pool at any time.
 - e) Swimmers should check on their next event and get drink/something to eat if they have time before their next event.
6. Things you, as a parent, can do after each swim if they visit you:
 - a) Relax!
 - b) Tell him/her how great they did! The coaching staff will be sure to discuss stroke technique with them. You need to tell him/her how proud you are and what a great job they did. This shows your support and also helps build their confidence that you are proud of them regardless of technique or speed. A good rule of thumb is not to say too much or to ask questions instead. Great questions are: "How was it?", "What do your coaches say?", or "What was your favorite part?". These questions should help get the conversation started and let the swimmer "take charge" of the conversation. After all, it is THEIR sport and THEIR experience.
 - c) Recommend they go back to sit with the team and relax.
 - d) This is another good time to revisit the bathrooms, get a drink or something light to eat.
 - e) The swimmer now waits until his/her next event is called and starts the procedure again.
 - f) Be vocal and supportive of all T2 athletes!
7. When a swimmer has completed all of their events they may go home. Swimmers should check with the coach before leaving to make sure they are not included on a relay.

Positive Check-In:

At most meets there are distance events (400 yards/meters and longer) that require “positive check-in”. This means that swimmers need to initial next to their name on a check-in sheet provided by the host team. This is done to ensure that there are full heats for distance events during meets. Check-in for events is usually done before the meet starts as there will be a set deadline that you have to check in by. If you do not check-in on time, then you cannot swim the event. If you check-in and do not show up for the event you will not be able to swim your next scheduled event. At some meets the coaches have to check in for the swimmers (because it is in a special room that only coaches can enter). All swimmers must check with their coaches to ensure that they have been properly checked in!

Prelim/Final Meets:

Several meets during the year are “Prelim/Final” meets. These are meets that have qualifying heats in the morning and then “final” heats in the evening. There may be 6, 8, or 10 finalists for each event depending on the number of lanes in the pool. Sometimes, usually just for “Open” (15 and older) or “13-14” age groups, there are 2 heats of finals. After the prelims session the results are posted and announced. Swimmers then have 30 minutes to “scratch”, which is declaring that they will not be swimming in finals. After the 30 minutes has passed then the remaining top 6, 8, or 10 swimmers will be in “finals”. There are also alternates designated after the 30 minutes have passed. These alternates have the opportunity to go to finals and will be put into the final if a swimmer scheduled to swim in finals does not show up. If you are scheduled to swim in finals after the 30 minute time period has passed and you do not show up for the final you will be removed from your next scheduled event.

Getting Disqualified

There are many rules in the sport of swimming and sometimes swimmers are “disqualified”. This just means that their time will not be “official”. EVERYONE gets disqualified from time to time. At T2 Aquatics, we hope that the swimmers do not get disqualified, but when they do, it is not a big deal. In the National Football League there are yellow flags flying around the entire time! There is no need to get too worked up about it in swimming! As a swimmer it is important to understand what you need to improve on in the future. As coaches it is important that we are able to help the swimmer understand the skill that needs to be performed. As a parent it is important that you support the swimmer with a positive attitude – and encourage them to continue to working to master the skill!

Types of Swim Meets

- **T2 Age Group Grand Prix Meets** – These competitions are for the younger age groups at T2 Aquatics and are short one session meets at the Norris Pool. These are a great way for our younger athletes to get a feel for how a USA Swim Meet will run and they can practice using a meet program and finding their heat/lane by themselves. Athletes will have the opportunity to do multiple events when appropriate so coaches can evaluate their progress.
- **Invitational Meets** – Most competitions T2 Aquatics participate are invitational swim meets. These competitions may be open to any USA Swimming registered team from anywhere in the United States. These types of meets typically range from 1 to 3 days and can feature a prelim-final format or just timed finals.
- **Florida Age Group Championships (FLAGS)** - FLAGS is held twice a year; March in a 25-yard pool, July in a 50-meter pool. Participants must be 14 years old or younger and have achieved at least one qualifying time to participate in an individual event. FLAGS is the fastest 14&under competition in which our team participates.
- **Florida Senior Championships** – Similar to FLAGS, Senior Championships are held twice a year as well. Senior Championships are only open to Florida Swimming registered swimmers. This competition features teams from across the state and represents a season-ending championship meet for many of our athletes.
- **Sectionals** – This is a senior level meet that is held twice a year and has qualifying standards. Generally T2 will compete at the “Southern Zone” sectional meet. These standards are faster than Florida Senior Championship qualifying standards.
- **Futures Championships** – There are four “Futures” meets across the country at the end of the long course season – each with the same qualifying times. The qualifying times are faster than sectionals but under Junior Nationals.

- **Arena Pro Swim Series** - (Formerly known as Grand Prix Meets) – These meets are held at different venues across the country throughout the year. Each meet has different qualifying times and is a great chance for athletes to race Long Course Meters against some great competition at different points in the season.
- **Junior National Championships** - This is the highest level meet for 18 & under swimmers in the United States. A short course championship is typically held in December with a long course championship held in August.
- **National Championships (Senior Nationals)** – Other than the Olympics Trials and World Championships, the highest level of competition for our senior swimmers is the US National Championships. Swimmers meeting the national time standards travel to various cities in the US to compete against America’s best swimmers. This meet often serves as a selection meet for athletes striving to make US National teams, such as the Pan American Team, World University Games, and Pan Pacific team.
- **USA Olympic Trials** – At this meet the USA Olympic Team is selected. Held in June of an Olympic Year and has the most challenging qualifying standards of any meet in the country.

Questions?

When all else fails, remember to ask for help! If during a swim meet a swimmer or parent feels lost or confused, be sure to ask any T2 parent for help! We have all had our “first meets” and know it can be overwhelming. Once you have attended one or two meets, it will all become very routine and enjoyable.