**First Time to a Swim Meet?**

***A Practical Guide for parents and swimmers new to swim meets***

Swim meets can be a great family experience! Listed below are some very in-depth guidelines geared to help you through your first couple of swim meets. It may seem a little overwhelming, but we tried to be as specific and as detailed as we possibly could. If you have any questions, seek out your child’s coach or an experienced MYM team parent for more specific details. Also, for additional information regarding swim meets, see the *Parents/Signing Up for Meets* tabs and the *Meet Day Guidelines* under the Swimmers tab on the team website – www.mymdolphins.org.

**Prior to the Meet**

1. You may need to sign your child up to swim in the meet. Generally speaking, there are two types of swim meets in terms of how your child is entered.

A. AUTO-ENTRY

Most of our meets are what we call AUTO-ENTRY - which means that your child will automatically be entered if s/he qualifies. You don’t have to do a thing.

Your coach will determine whether your child is within the age groups for the meet and whether s/he qualifies for the meet based on meet cuts (published qualifying times). Most importantly, if your child is new to swimming competitively, the coach will determine whether s/he is ready to swim in that meet.

If your child qualifies for an AUTO-ENTRY meet, s/he is expected to swim in that meet unless s/he has been excused from the meet by the coach or otherwise noted.

B. OPT-IN - SUBMIT INTEREST BY DEADLINE

The other type of meet requires you to indicate your child’s interest in entering the meet by OPT(ing)-IN. Information about the swim meet, typically in the form of a document called Meet Info, can be found attached to the Event on the team website. There will always be an entry deadline imposed for the OPT-IN meets that give our coaches enough time to prepare and submit the entries in a timely manner so that our team will be able to participate in the meet. Occasionally, we are shut out of USA meets because they become oversubscribed before our entries are in.

* 1. Pay particular attention to the number of events a child can register for on each day, and if they require a qualifying time. Qualifying times vary by meet – Y meets and USA meets have different standards for Bronze, Silver, States/Gold (NJ Junior Olympics). All of the time standards are provided under the Swimmer tab on the team website. If you have trouble figuring out which standard applies, please ask a coach or an experienced swim parent.

b. If you are not sure what events your child should swim in the meet or if you are just confused by all of this, by all means, ask your child’s coach. You do not have to struggle through any of this.

1. When the entries for a meet are submitted, the coaches will attach the meet entries to the Event on the website. The Meet Entries will list, by swimmer, the events s/he is entered in, except for relays, which are decided by the coaches at a later time. Between the Meet Info and the Meet Entries, you can figure out approximately when your child will be swimming based upon gender, age group and event number.

Tip: Indoor meets, even during the winter, can tend to get pretty hot and muggy. Spectators should plan on packing a pair of shorts to wear inside and layer on the top so you can get comfortable.

1. See the information under the *Swimmer/Nutrition* tabs of the team website for what your swimmer should eat/drink before and during the meet.

**Before the Meet Starts**

1. Check your email and the team website for last minute information, weather delays and cancellations.
2. Arrive at the pool **at least** 15 minutes before the scheduled warm-up/check-in time begins. This time will be listed in the meet information and will be confirmed by the coach. Warm-up time is limited and MYM swimmers will enter the pool on time. If you roll in at the beginning of warm up time, find the team, then change into your competition suit, you will miss a lot of the warm-up! If you’re wondering if warm-ups are mandatory – yes, regardless of what time your swimmer’s events occur! If you do not check-in by the designated warm-up/check-in time, your child will be scratched from the meet. So check directions, leave extra time for traffic and be on time!

Tip: At larger meets, such as invitationals and championship meets, the swimmers may have a separate entrance to the building and the pool deck where parents will not be permitted to accompany them. They will enter the building and find their teammates and coaches. Once you enter the building through the spectator entrance, you will usually see them emerge. They may then ignore you if you are very very embarrassing, but they secretly love that you are there.

1. Upon arrival, find the MYM swimmers area. The MYM swimmers will usually sit in an area together either on deck or in an adjacent gymnasium or large room, so look for familiar faces. Then find a place to put your swimmer’s swim bags, etc.

Tip: According to YMCA and USA Swimming Rules and the rules of swim venues and for insurance and fire code purposes, spectators are not allowed on deck unless they are serving in an official meet capacity (as an official, coach, timer, runner, etc.). Often at swim meets, spectators are relegated to observe from stands that are not on the pool deck. You will not be able to stay with your child on the pool deck.

1. Your swimmer must check in no later than the designated check in time with the MYM Coach taking attendance on deck. If the swimmer is late checking in, s/he will be scratched from the meet.
2. When you pay the spectator’s entry fee (usually $5-7 for a session of an invitational meet), purchase a heat sheet at the same time (usually anywhere from $2 to $10 – maybe more for a multi-day meet). This will usually be in paper form, but more and more clubs are using the Meet Mobile App and heat sheets are beginning to be sold through the App. The heat sheet, in whatever form, will list all the events for the meet, in chronological order. Your child is listed somewhere in there. Typically they are listed by stroke and gender. They are also broken up by age groups, so a quick scan for your child’s gender and age should yield the events for you. Purchasing a heat sheet is optional, but you may feel very lost without it. Once your swimmer dons suit and cap and is in a sea of similarly sized swimmers with the same cap and suit, it is very difficult to know from a distance whether you are cheering for the right child!

Tip: Along with the blanket and the deck chair – put a highlighter in your swim meet kit.

Tip: If this is the first time your child has competed at a swim meet, don’t be surprised to see “NT” next to his/her name on the heat sheet – this just means they have “No Time” in that event. Otherwise it will list their best official time on the date the entry was submitted.

Another observation about heat sheets: the higher heat number, the faster the swimmers. Likewise, the fastest swimmers in each heat will swim in the center lanes, slower swimmers in the outer lanes, based on their seed times.

Final Note about heat sheets: Know what you are getting – sometimes, you will get a Psych Sheet, which is a list of the entered swimmers from fastest to slowest by event, gender and age group, and while it is a rough estimate of the reverse order in which the swimmers will appear, it is not as accurate as the heat sheets and will not show the swimmers by heat. Sometimes, if you purchase a psych sheet, you will also receive a heat sheet when they are ready. It depends on what the host team is offering.

1. Do not be alarmed to see your swimmer’s events written on his/her arm or hand with a dark marker. The coaches or swimmers will write the event #, heat # and lane #. Most swimmers will write on themselves or each other. This helps him/her remember what events s/he is swimming in and what event numbers to listen for.
2. Your swimmer now gets his/her cap and goggles and reports to the pool and/or coach for warm-up instructions. It is very important for all swimmers to warm-up with the team. Swimmers’ bodies are just like cars on a cold day – they need to get the engine going, and warmed up, before they can go all out.
3. After warm-up, your swimmer will go back to the area where his/her personal items are and sit there until his/her first event is called. This is a good time to make sure s/he goes to the bathroom if necessary, gets a drink and gets settled in.

Tip: If your child is 8 or younger, there may be a ‘Bullpen’ set up to which he or she will be called to before his/her events. This is to ensure that each young swimmer swims in the right event, heat and lane. The coaches will instruct your child on where to go.

**Once the Meet is in Motion…**

1. Generally a welcome will be given over the loudspeaker, followed by the national anthem.
2. Once the meet is underway, things can move very quickly. Most large meets employ “fly-over starts” where a heat will start immediately after the last swimmer in the prior heat touches the wall and before they have exited the water. Most scoreboards will display the event number and heat number. However it is best to pay attention because the electronic scoreboards sometimes malfunction.

Tip: Start paying close attention at the start of the event even if your child is in heat 5. In a short distance event, such as a 50 free, 5 heats will go by in a couple minutes. The heats are often not announced, or the announcements cannot be heard through the din. So put down your book at the start of the event or you might miss it completely!

1. When your swimmer approaches his/her lane, s/he can check in with the timers to verify that s/he is in the correct lane, as well as to let the timers know s/he is there.

Tip: Some times heats are combined at the last minute. Having your swimmer to their starting area early as well as having checked in with their timer ensures they won’t miss out if a sudden change is made.

1. After the swim, the swimmer needs to check in with the coach for any feedback on the swim.
2. Events will most likely be spread out throughout the meet – it’s important to keep paying attention to the heat sheet, the scoreboard and to the announcements.
3. Results are generally posted within an hour of the event – many parents like to write these down in the heat sheet, to keep track of their child’s progress. Many clubs have begun using the Meet Mobile App which will show all results including your swimmers time, and split times on your mobile phone or tablet.
4. Typically available at invitational meets will be food concessions and a local swimming retailer.

Tip: It works best to bring healthy snacks and beverages for your swimmer. The food at the concessions may not be something your swimmer will eat or that will properly fuel performance. See the the Swimmers/Nutrition tab on the team website.

1. Every team will be issued one or more lanes to cover for timing. Meets can’t happen without timers, and many starts are delayed as a result of timers’ chairs being empty. Pick up the stopwatch and learn how to time! Best seat in the house! We will be moving to a sign-up system on the new website, but will transition over time. You will be notified by the team volunteer manager during the week before the meet if it is your turn to time.
2. When a swimmer has completed all of his/her events s/he should remain at the meet to cheer on their teammates. In addition, check in with the coach to confirm whether the swimmer is expected to swim in a relay, which often takes place at the end of the meet. It is very important not to leave the meet if you are scheduled to swim in a relay. If one person in a relay is not there, the rest of the swimmers in the relay are deprived of the opportunity to swim in the relay.

**Who are all these people?**

1. One of the people in a white shirt and navy blue shorts/pants/skirts is the meet referee.
   1. This person has full authority over the meet schedule and events as well as over the other meet officials.
   2. They are typically the one who signals the starter that all officials are in position, the course is clear and that each competition can begin.
   3. Theirs is the final call on disqualifications.
2. The other people in white shirts and blue shorts/pants/skirts are officials.
   1. Starters – stand at the end of the pool where the starting blocks are. They tell the swimmers to step up on the blocks (long whistle), indicate when to take their marks, and start the race with the signal. Generally the signal is audible and visual (flashing light).
   2. Stroke and turn officials stand at either ends of the pools and sometimes also walk back and forth along the sides of the pool during events. They are watching for proper execution of the various strokes as well as the turns during the event. If they see an infraction, they will raise their hand for a period of time, and then usually another official, the chief judge, will proceed to write up the disqualification report.

Pitch: Officials are all volunteers. Meets cannot be run without officials. The results do not count if there are fewer than the minimum number of officials needed to run a meet. We are in dire need of officials at this time. It is quite easy to become an official. There is class that is given several times in the fall and an on-line, open-book test, that you can take in increments (you don’t have to sit through the whole thing in one sitting). Then you become an apprentice official for several meets, and off you go! We encourage every family to have a parent/guardian/grandparent train to be an official. The pool deck is the coolest place in the building, has the best views of the swimmers, involves free food (at invitational meets) and sometimes includes preferred parking! And of course, you get your own heat sheet and do not pay for admission if you are an official.

1. There are a lot of other people that make a meet but go a little more unnoticed than the people mentioned above. They include the Clerk of Course, the Head Timer (generally wearing 2 stopwatches and keeps an eye on timers), and the Timing Official who has to make the tough calls when there are discrepancies in times.
2. When a child is disqualified for a stroke, turn or start infraction, it’s important to not approach the officials with questions. They are doing their job, and actually doing the right thing by your child by pointing out where they are technically ‘illegal’. Coaches will receive the information and will communicate with the swimmer. You need to be a supportive parent to your child.
3. In general, avoid disturbing or asking questions of officials while they are on duty – they need to concentrate, for the benefit of all the swimmers, and asking them what heat is being swum, did my child just get DQed, etc., can be very distracting. Also, please be aware they are always monitoring multiple lanes; if you see their hand go up, it may not be for your child, so resist jumping to conclusions. And please always keep in mind – these are all volunteers, and usually parents too, so thank them when you see them!

Now you’re ready – go have a good time, and cheer on your swimmer and team!

**Before You Leave the House….Here’s Your Checklist:**

* Swim Suits (the team has competition suits which you are required to wear – in the case of Championship meets, swimmers are permitted to wear technical suits) and bring a spare suit – just in case. If your swimmer does not yet have a team suit, a plain black suit is OK.
* 2 MYM team swim caps (bring 2 – they occasionally break)
* Goggles; best to have a back-up pair too (but it is not a great idea to wear new goggles for the first time at a meet – they often end up around the swimmer’s neck and cause stress and distraction – if you must wear brand new goggles, wear them for warm ups and make sure they are adjusted properly.)
* Towels – pack at least 2/day
* Something to sit on – both for you and for your child. Old blanket, sleeping bag for him/her; stadium seat or seat cushion for you. Deck chairs are not permitted at many venues, so don’t be surprised if you are asked not to use it or are asked to move to the hallway.
* Sweatshirts, hoodies, flannel bottoms, etc. Best to bring two sets – they will most likely get wet. Temperatures in swim venues can range from very hot to cold. Be prepared and remember your swimmer is wet for much of the time, so a little chilly can be downright bone numbing to a child.
* T-shirts – 2 is a good number
* Pool sandals or flip flops
* Travel games, decks of cards, mp3 players and music, books, etc. However, keep in mind that each swimmer is responsible for his/her items – if it’s expensive to replace, don’t bring it.
* Snack bag – including drinks such as fruit juice, Gatorade, waters; granola bars, fun fruits, yogurts, cereal, jello cubes, sandwiches, crackers, peanut butter, etc. It’s best not to bring candy, chocolate, etc. – avoid these items before and during a meet.
* Highlighter; money for admission and heat sheet.