



## Parent's Primer for That First Meet

*By Long-Time "Swim Mom" Cees Albright*

***"Be prepared" may be the Boy Scout motto but it's also highly recommended for swim meets. Our initial experience was anything but prepared!***

Our first meet was on Bainbridge Island so we began our day by missing the ferry. Arriving late we trekked, from our distant parking spot, through the cold drizzle, into the pool building. Instantly we were bombarded with noise and a mass of humanity seemingly running every which way. We managed (eventually!) to locate the coach and learned that we missed warm-ups and that our seven-year-old, Taryn, needed to get to her lane for her first event. I took her in the general direction of the coach's extended arm and then pestered everyone around until I got her to the right spot. At this point she is confused, overwhelmed and ready to bolt for the door. Instead she bolts off the blocks before the start whistle and has to get out of the water and back up on the blocks.

With Taryn kind of settled in we tried to figure out what we were supposed to do. The place was hot and we were already uncomfortable when we realized that the stands were packed and parents had overflowed into camp chairs set up everywhere. Camp chairs? In addition they had coolers, bags of food and towels. Towels? Since the Y always provided towels at swim practice we assumed that was standard procedure at pools. Sigh. Back to the car to scrounge for t-shirts, clean rags etc.

Eventually we got through that day – with headaches – and a long list of what we would do better.

### **Packing**

- Spare goggles, suit and cap
- Towels – lots of towels (for the shower and to keep warm and dry between events)
- Folding chairs (not always necessary but it's better to leave them in the trunk of the car than to be without seating)
- Food/drink/cooler – usually a concession stand is provided but they may not have what you want or need (or you may just prefer to save the cash)
- Aspirin – I seem to have adjusted now but the constant noise gave me a headache for several years and I still haven't figured out why I'm the exhausted one at the end of the day!
- Dead time tools – for both you and the kids (books, games, computer etc.)
- Money – for food and heat sheets
- Camera – telephoto is really, really nice and be sure and send good shots to Brigitte for the newsletter

- Walking or running shoes – it can be really nice to get a little exercise after the first few hours!
- Directions / map to the pool
- Highlighter and pens or markers for the heat sheet. The heat sheet usually costs \$3 to \$6 and contains all the meet information – who, what, when and where. For the younger set, parents usually write the names and events in a grid on the arm or leg with a Sharpie. It will look something like this (E = Event, H = Heat and L = Lane):

E	H	L	
1	3	4	M Relay
5	6	2	50 Fr
13	2	5	100 Fly
22	5	3	50 Bk

### Ready to Go

Allow yourself plenty of time for the commute and don't forget to factor in any stops for gas, money or coffee. *(It can be preferable to get a motel room for some of the meets depending on your budget and your tolerance for long drives and early mornings. Frequently a "team" hotel is posted on the web site so we can all stay together --and the kids like to stay together! In summer camping by the pool is sometimes permitted and can be a lot of fun.)* Plan to get to the pool so that the swimmer is ready and dressed five to 10 minutes before warm-ups start.

Many pool buildings are quite warm and you need to dress accordingly. My comfort range is very narrow so I usually wear a tank top, shorts and sandals (bringing jeans, sweaters, boots etc. for later). Some folks are perfectly comfortable in jeans and t-shirt.

Now that you are in the building you need to make sure your swimmer gets to the coach to check in for warm-ups. Younger kids may need help suiting up, showering in the appropriate locker room and locating the coaches table on deck (older kids have already left you standing in the lobby, or even the parking lot).

Check-in also determines relays. Relays are a rare chance to race with teammates. If the swimmer doesn't check in before warm-ups the coach may give their place to another swimmer. Even worse, if your child doesn't show up on time you could leave three disappointed teammates watching instead of racing. Relays are too much fun to miss.

While your swimmer is connecting with the coach you can go find a place to sit. Look around for familiar faces (and people wearing the red STINGRAY SWIMMING t-shirt/**NOW WHITE-2013**) – frequently some thoughtful (and early!) SRST parent has staked out an area by covering it with towels and blankets. The area around the pool is

called “the deck” and is off limits – especially at the bigger pools like the King County Aquatic Center in Federal Way – but sometimes areas of the deck are available. Keep the view in mind. After all this preparation you’ll want to see the races 😊.

Now that you are settled in with the other team parents you can peruse the heat sheet at your leisure. You will have gaps of time between your swimmer’s races. You can use this time to get to know the other parents, cheer for all SRST swimmers, take a walk, run errands, read, or catch up on paperwork. Warm-up is also a great time to break out the camera since everything is still fairly relaxed.

Once the races start you may need to remind your child to check in with their coach before and after each race. It’s usually a good idea to refrain from “coaching” your own kids – that’s why we pay the big bucks to those folks down on deck.

### **Other Important Notes**

- Challenge meets have two sessions each day so if you have multiple kids you may be in for a very long day (approx. 7:45 a.m. to 5 p.m.). It gets even longer at championship meets. Bring plenty to do and make sure your kids also have plenty to occupy their down time (hopefully their spending a fair amount of that time cheering their teammates on).
- If you want to be in the thick of things then sign up to time the races – you’ll be right on deck. Typically you’ll be assigned a lane for a two or three hour period. Ask an experienced parent to point you in the right direction and be sure and tell the coordinator that you are a novice. They’ll pair you with a pro. You’ll notice most experienced timers are in shorts and sandals to accommodate the splashing.
- Generally swimmers should stay on deck so they can be accessible to the coach, cheer for their teammates and create a presence. Younger swimmers (or swimmers with homework 😊) may want (need?) to be with their parents up in the stands. If this is the case, be sure and send any swimmer down well before his/her race so they can check-in with the coach. The coach will not be able to go hunt for a missing swimmer and they could miss their event.

And that leaves us to the most important point - have fun!