

Swim Meet Primer for Parents

SO your child is going to be in a swim meet! This is a great opportunity for him/her to put all those skills that were learned in practice to good use. It is also a great place for your child to interact with his/her peers on our team and from other teams that will be there. This primer is designed to answer many of the questions you may have about going to meets with the Barracudas, in order to make your experience, and that of your child, as enjoyable as possible.

Before the meet

You first need to **sign up** your child up for each meet he/she wishes to attend. On the team website, at the bottom of the home page are a list of meets we will attend as a team. When the meet is open for sign up, a "Edit Commitment" button will appear alongside the meet name. Sign yourself into the website, then click that button to sign your child up for that meet. As part of the sign-up procedure, there is a dialog box that you can use to (1) indicate any events you child may want to swim and/or (2) let the coaches know if you will only be participating on particular days of the meet if it is a multi-day event

As far as events go, a child may request which events he/she wishes to swim. However, the final decision on events belongs to the coach. Since he works most closely with each child during practice, he may wish to have them swim certain events to gauge their progress, instill confidence, or present an appropriate challenge. Relays are determined by the coaches once they know how many swimmers in each age-group have signed up.

Once entries are done, the amount of entry fees can be determined. The fees usually consist of a one-time swimmer fee plus an amount per event. The club passes these fees on to the host team when we submit our entries, so it is expected that you pay your fees before the meet. If you have a credit card or ACH authorization on file with the club, then the fees will be automatically charged to your account. In addition, BSC charges \$5.00 per swimmer per day for out of town meets to help defray the costs associated with the coaches' travel. Meet fees will be posted on the Meet page on our website.

Speaking of the Meet Page on our website

If you click on the name of the meet on our website, you will be taken to the Meet Page for that event. This page provides **valuable information** for you! There should be a link to the meet information, which you should read through before signing up. The **meet information** will give you the dates and location of the meet, the approximately starting times of each session, the entry fees associated with that meet, the order of events, etc. Once the coaches have done the **meet entries**, there will be a link to look those over on the Meet Page, as well as a meet fee summary showing the **entry fees**, exclusive of any coaching fees. When the **warm up times** have been determined, they will be posted on the Meet Page. Sometimes, there are **special instructions** (parking, etc) given prior to the meet, which will also be posted.

What to bring

Going to a swim meet is a lot like going on a camping trip. There are some essentials that you absolutely cannot do without, as well as some luxury items that may make the time at the meet more pleasant for you and your child.

Essentials

Team swim suit

Team Cap

Towels (Lots of them -- they get wet in a hurry!)

Goggles (and maybe an extra pair)

Sleeping bag or Blanket for the swimmer to relax on

Sweats/Warm-ups

Gym bag to put it all in

Dry clothes to wear after the meet

Pen or Sharpie marker (to underline heat sheet and write events/heats/lanes on your swimmer)

Some other suggested items

A chair for you

Cards, games, books, CD player, etc, to keep your child entertained between events

Cards, knitting, books, CD player, etc, to keep you entertained between events

Healthy snacks (see more detail below)

Nutrition

Since most meet sessions last around 5 hours (including warm-ups), it is almost a certainty that your child (and maybe even you) will need some refueling. Most meets have concession stands, however the fare is usually less than appropriate for the athletes, consisting of a lot of junk food. In fact, the coaches have been known to confiscate junk food from the swimmers during the meet and eat it themselves in order to protect their athletes! In addition, buying a lot of food at the concession stand can become costly.

It is recommended that you bring along some healthy snacks for the swimmer to eat before and during the competition. Also, each swimmer should have a water bottle filled with water or sports drink to sip on throughout the day. Foods that are high in carbohydrates and low in fats are best. Rehydration is also important.

Here are some suggestions:

Gatorade or sports drink

Bagels / Lite cream cheese or jam spread

Juice

Fruit (be aware that some swimmers may find it harder to tolerate citrus fruits)

Crackers

Non-sugary cereals (Cheerios, etc)

Lowfat yogurt

Veggies

Some definite things to avoid:

Soda and other carbonated beverages (decreases an athlete's MaxVO₂)

Commercially-made bakery products (usually high in sugar and fat)

High-fat or high-sugar foods

What to expect at the meet

Arrival: Be aware of the time you should arrive at the meet site. **Please be on time.** Allow yourself plenty of time if you are going to a pool you haven't been to before. The coach usually expects a swimmer at the pool 15-20 minutes before the scheduled start of warm-ups so that they can stretch as a team and go over some last-minute information the coach may have for them (such as relay assignments). When you arrive, find the **team area** and set up your gear there. You will have a chance to meet other parents from the team, as well as your child's friends.

Warm-up: The team will participate in a warm-up together in preparation for the meet. The coach will direct this activity. The children should be on the deck and ready for warm-up (cap, suit, goggles on) by the announced warm-up time. At some meets there may be an early and late warm-up session. Sometimes the host will inform the coach of this ahead of time, and sometimes he does not find out until he gets to the meet. In either case, if your child is at the pool at the time the coach has indicated, he/she will be ready for either eventuality. Either before or after the warm-up the coaches will have a brief team meeting to go over any important information you and your child may need to know. *Usually relays are announced at this meeting. If your child is in a relay, be sure to stay for that event! Leaving early not only deprives your child of the opportunity to swim in the relay, but three other children will miss their opportunity, too.*

The actual meet: At most meets there will be a **heat sheet** published and sold which will list which heat (group) and lane your child is in for his/her events. It is very important to check this when you arrive and bring any errors to the attention of the coach. Most younger swimmers (and some older swimmers) find it helpful to have the Event/Event Number/Heat/Lane written on their arm or leg with a pen or permanent Sharpie marker.

Once the meet begins, an event will be called and the child will either report to the "Bullpen" or directly behind the starting blocks, ready to swim. The Bullpen (sometimes called the "Clerk of Course") is a staging area where the swimmers are organized prior to being escorted to the blocks by volunteers helping with the meet. If a meet does not utilize a Bullpen, then the swimmer should go behind his/her block when his/her event is called. Usually it's only the 8 & under swimmers who use the Bullpen.

The referee will blow a series of short whistles indicating that a new heat is going to be started. Next, one long whistle will direct the swimmers in that heat to stand up on the block (or get in the pool for the backstroke events). The starter will say "Take your mark" and then beep a horn to start the race.

Once the race is over, the swimmer should politely ask the timer his/her time, and then report directly to the coach. The coach will review the race with the swimmer, pointing out where good things occurred, and perhaps offering hints and encouragement for future improvement. After the coach is finished talking with the swimmer, he/she can come and see you so you can congratulate them on a job well-done! The swimmer should then go back to the team area to rest and get ready for his/her next event.

After the meet: Once a swimmer has completed all his/her events, *including relays*, he/she is free to go. Sometimes a parent will help organize a team dinner at away meets that all members are welcome to participate in. If it is a multi-day meet, be sure to have towels, warm-ups, etc, dry and ready to go for the next day.

Some final thoughts

1. **Let the coach be the coach and you be the parent.** Your child needs to know that his/her worth to you is not tied to performance. The coach will handle critiquing the race. If you want to know what was discussed, one of the best ways to do so is to casually ask "So, what did coach have to say about your swim?" Perhaps you noticed something the coach did not point out to the swimmer; Be aware that the coach will choose what he feels is most important to mention at that time. He may not choose to point out some things, or he may choose to emphasize one thing over another. Receiving a different, perhaps conflicting, critique from the parent may confuse the swimmer or lessen the effectiveness of the coach's comments.

2. **Be the swimmer's biggest fan.** Swimming teaches a lot of life-skills, among them dealing effectively with success and with disappointment. If the swimmer knows that that win or lose, you are still on his/her side, then dealing with the highs and lows of the sport will come much more easily.

3. Relays are an important part the meet. Most of the events at a meet are individual in nature. Relays allow a child to come together with his/her peers in a "team" event. If a child is assigned to a relay, three other swimmers are counting on him/her to be able to compete. Please do not belittle this aspect of the sport by asking that your child be excused from swimming on a relay just to leave the meet earlier. This sends a very negative message about the importance of being on a team, and shows a selfish attitude toward one's teammates.

4. I do not recommend paying a swimmer for performances. It is better that they seek to achieve performances for intrinsic rather than extrinsic rewards. This has a much longer-lasting effect, and directly relates to setting goals for personal achievement.

5. At most meet there will be a **swim shop** selling everything from commemorative meet T-shirts to suits and goggles. Sometimes, good bargains on practice suits can be found. Think through what you are willing/need to purchase before you get to the meet. It may save some headaches later on.

6. Meets cannot be run without volunteer parents. As you continue in the sport of swimming, you will come to recognize the many, many countless hours that parents volunteer to help make this sport something special for the children involved. At meets, parents man watches behind the lane, work the computers to tabulate results, and serve as officials. Most of the time, the host team tries to fill all these positions from within their own club, but many clubs have parents from the visiting teams also helping out. One of the easiest positions is that of a timer. If you have an interest in learning the rules, then officiating (stroke and turn judge, referee) may be right up you alley. When we host a meet, many behind-the-scenes jobs are handled by our parents. If you have an interest in an area, don't be shy. Training and opportunities are available for you!

The Barracudas hope you have found this little primer helpful. if you have any further questions, please feel free to ask a coach or one of our veteran swim parents! *Swim fast and have fun!!*