

You're first USA Swim Meet – What to Expect

General Information

Swim meets are offered every four to six weeks and are swum in either a 25 yard 25 meter, or 50 meter pool depending on the time of the year. The swim year is divided into two seasons

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

Swim meets are offered at various levels - for the beginner swimmer on up to the most advanced, and for all age groups. The level of meet your swimmer will compete in will depend on how fast their official recorded USA Swimming times are, and how old they are. However, some meets are open for all swimmers to compete (Open Meets), including swimmers with no officially recorded USA Swimming times.

First time USA Swimmers will typically compete in an Open meet for their first meet and will be entered with a no time (NT) for each event they swim.

Swimmers 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 age group categories are:

- 8 and under
- 9-10
- 11-12
- 13-14
- 15 and up

USA Swim Meets 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 per day (excluding relays).

Helpful Links

Gulf Swimming: <http://www.gulfswimming.org/>

USA Swimming: <http://www.usaswimming.org/>

Participating in a Meet with Power Aquatics

Signing up for Meets

Power Aquatics has implemented a procedure for letting the coaching staff know if your swimmer is available to compete on a given weekend. Please email coachsharon@poweraquatics.org to let her know your intent to have your swimmer entered; and bring/send a check (**Power Aquatics, 22526 Cove Hollow Drive, Katy TX 77450**). The check must be **received** prior to the Power for Life published deadline.

Which Events?

Your swimmer's coach will determine which events your swimmer will compete in. This decision may be done with or without input from the swimmer. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the swimmer is competing in appropriate events for their personal development, and for the development of their overall swim season. 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 their 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 is technique, endurance, and race strategy.

Preparing for the Meet

Meet details including dates, qualifying times, cut-offs, event limits, directions, map to the pool, etc can be accessed from the meet Invitation posted on the Gulf Swimming Website, under the "Meets" link.

The Wednesday before the start of the meet, the Gulf Swimming Website will be updated with the warm-up sessions start times and lane assignments for each team, and the estimated timeline for each event offered. However, remember that the timeline is an estimate and that the meet may run faster or slower.

POWER FOR LIFE SWIM TEAM *presents*

What to Bring

- Competition suit
- Team cap (plus a spare – they can rip)
- Goggles (plus a spare – they can break)
- Towels – 2 to 3
- Beverages to re-hydrate – water or sports drinks
- Snacks to refuel – carbohydrates, protein, fruit (no candy or greasy food). There is usually a snack bar, but they may not offer appropriate selections, or selections your child enjoys
- 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
- Print-out of the meet timeline from the Gulf Swimming Website
- Print-out of the warm-up sessions, times and lane assignments for Power for Life from the Gulf Swimming Website
- Pen, highlighter

The Meet

Before the Meet Starts

- Arrive at least 15 minutes before the start of the Power for Life warm-up session as posted on the Gulf Swimming Website
- During the short course season, swimmers must “Circle In” (check-in) for each distance (400's and up) event entered to be eligible to swim. Near the entry to the pool, locate the swimmer listings which are typically posted on poster board and organized by gender, then by age-group. On each age-group poster board, you will see the events of the day, with a listing of each swimmer who entered the event. The swimmer needs to circle the number next to their name for each event they entered for that particular day.
- For the Long course season, all swimmers attending meets will be required to circle in for every event.
- Locate other Power for Life swimmers and parents to sit near. Look for other parents wearing a POWER shirt!
- Swimmers should start getting ready to warm-up. When the session is about to start, the Power for Life swimmer should proceed to the swim deck and locate the Power for Life Coach for instructions. Swimmers are not allowed to enter the pool without a coach on deck.
- Parents must stay in the designated seating area unless they are timing. Only swimmers, coaches and officials are allowed on deck.
- While your swimmer is warming up
 - Purchase a heat sheet (listing of all swimmers entered in each event)
 - Check to make sure your swimmer circled in all of their events (if required)
 - Use your highlighter to highlight the names of other Power for Life swimmers entered on your heat sheet. This will help you not only keep track of the meet, but help you become familiar with other swimmers on the team.

POWER FOR LIFE SWIM TEAM *presents*

- When the swimmers finish warm-up
 - Review with your swimmer what events he/she is competing in that day
 - Write the event numbers on the wrist of the swimmer with your pen
 - Encourage swimmer to drink or eat something if they are not scheduled to swim for at least 30 min

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 compete before the boys.

Swimmers are organized into “heats” and lane assignments based on their entry time for that event. Unlike many summer league swim programs, there are no “ready benches” or team volunteers to make sure swimmers get to their heat and lanes on time. Swimmers and parents must pay attention to the meet events. Remember the timeline posted on the Gulf Swimming website and the heat sheet are only estimated times and the actual meet may run significantly slower or faster.

Heat and lane assignments are posted on deck for the swimmers, and usually near the seating section as well, before the start of the event. Where and how can vary from meet to meet, so ask a veteran parent to help you identify how it is being done at your meet.

Obtaining the heat/lane assignments and having swimmers ready & behind the blocks in time for their race is probably the most stressful detail for new swimmers and parents – especially for our younger swimmers. Ask another parent and/or swimmer for help.....they were once in your shoes! But remember, parents are not allowed on deck. This is for safety reasons and to reduce the confusion behind the blocks.

Before each Race

After swimmers get their heat and lane assignments, they are expect to talk to their coaches to inform them of their heat & lane assignments, and to get race instructions.

After speaking with their coach, they should stand behind their assigned lane, check with the timer to make sure they are in the right lane, and that they know their heat number. When their heat is called by the starter, they should proceed to the blocks.

After each Race

Immediately after each race, the swimmer is expected to speak to their coach to get feedback on their race. Swimmers will be told what they did correctly, and what they need to work on to improve, regardless of how well they did or did not do in the race.

Coaches may ask a swimmer to “warm-down” after a race if the facility has an extra pool. Warming down (swimming slow laps) helps to loosen strained muscles and reduce the lactic acid build-up from the race. By warming-down, the swimmer’s muscles recover sooner for their next race.

After race talks with coaches and warm-downs should be completed by the swimmer prior to returning to their seats and speaking with their parents.

Meet Logistics

USA swim meets are run solely by volunteers, each critical to the success of the meet

- USA Swimming Certified Officials
- Parent timing volunteers from all teams
- Army of volunteers from the host team

Officials

The officials are the most visible volunteers, wearing kakhi pants/shorts and white shirts. The Meet Referee, Deck Referee, Starters and Stroke & Turn Judges have all gone through a certification program for each position they fill. Many fill more than one role during the meet.

Unlike many officials in other sports, USA Swimming officials are not there to “catch” swimmers doing something wrong. They are there to “observe” and to make sure the races are swum fairly. Unlike the Olympics, there are not two officials at each end of the pool for each lane. Each stroke and turn judge is responsible for watching multiple lanes and may have to judge both strokes and turns for their end of the pool. Disqualifications are not viewed as a penalty, but as an opportunity for the swimmer to learn what he/she did incorrectly so that they can work with their coach in correcting the mistake.

Only coaches are allowed to approach officials to question a call, or inquire if a swimmer can be placed in a subsequent heat due to missing their race. If you have a question for an official, please speak to one of the Power for Life coaches at the meet.

Officials do have the authority to remove parents from the pool area if they are abusive or interfere with the running of the meet.

Timers

Parents from each visiting team are required to time at meets. Each team is assigned a number of lanes or seats they are responsible for. Those assignments are based on the number of swimmers the team has entered in the meet. The host team is not assigned timing seats as they are fulfilling the many other volunteer roles needed to run a meet, but they do provide a head timer which provides stop watch backup. **[Power Parents are required to fill a time slot if their swimmer has been entered in the meet.](#)**

Host Team Volunteers

Volunteers from the host team fulfill a wide variety of positions required to prepare for and run a meet successfully. Some of those positions are listed below

- Meet Director
- Computer Console Operators
- Equipment Setup
- Clerk of Course
- Head Timer
- Safety Marshals
- Awards
- Heat Sheet
- Snack bar & Hospitality
- Setup/Cleanup
- Parking Lot control