

News For

SWIM PARENTS

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What To Expect At Swim Meets

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Swim Parent

Here are some informational items that may be of help to parents as the summer long course competition season approaches. As a parent, I know it is good to review these things at the start of the season.

First of all, your child is participating in a wonderful but demanding activity. Their bodies will become tanner and leaner, their appetites will be healthy, their hair lighter (and maybe tackier or even fluorescent), and they will feel good about themselves.

They will want their parents to be there to glory in their achievements with them and have a comforting hug ready when that, too, is needed. Your swimmer wants and needs your support. The swim season can become a real family activity.

Hopefully, all children will have an opportunity to compete in either a dual meet or an invitational meet. Dual meets are held with one other team either at the home pool or at the opponent's pool. It is important to check the team bulletin boards and newsletter or speak with the coach well in advance of the event to find out travel arrangements and line ups. If your child is unable to attend the meet it is important to notify the coach as soon as possible, at least a week in advance.

At home meets parent's assistance is needed to help make the meet efficient and well run. Parents can time, work concessions, work at the awards table, and score the meet. Kids love to see their parents doing their share. It's a wonderful way to meet other team parents, and it helps make a meet go faster.

What to bring to dual meets:

Summer dual meets in our area are usually outdoors and usually during the evening. The weather can change in a few hours from very warm to cool and rainy. Be prepared for all kinds of weather.

Parents will probably want to bring lawn chairs. It is worth investing in lightweight portable chairs. In some areas you will also be grateful for bug spray.

At most dual meets, concessions are limited. Pop, coffee, candy and other snacks are typically offered. If you feel you or your swimmer will require special sustenance you will need to bring it yourself.

Don't forget to cheer for the whole team in addition to cheering for your own child -- dual meets are a team effort.

The other kind of meet is an invitational USA Swimming meet. These are large meets with many teams and hundreds of participants. USAmeets require early registration. Decisions regarding signing up for these meets have to be made well in advance of the meets themselves -- usually at least two weeks.

Entry procedures vary from team to team. In some programs the coach oversees the entire entry process. In other programs, parents are responsible. In either case, once entries are sent in to the host team it is generally not possible to receive a refund on your entry fee.

In our program the coaches advise the swimmers on which meets they should attend. Once the swimmers decide on the meets and days they can attend, the coaches decide the events the swimmer should participate in. Sometimes a swimmer will be entered in an event that he doesn't feel is his strongest, but the coach still wants him to have the experience of trying. Parents should try to support the coaches and encourage their swimmer to do his best.

Parents make great parents, but they make terrible coaches!

The ten year old breaststroker with an illegal fly could very well become a state champion flyer years later. Early experience in all strokes and events is an important part of the swimmer's total development -- both in terms of skills, and in terms of developing positive attitudes towards difficult tasks.

In most programs the coaches make up relay line-ups. Usually relays are put together to make the fastest combination of swimmers available. Exceptions could occur if a swimmer is late to warm-ups, hasn't made practice that week, etc. Again, parents need to support these coaching decisions. Of course, it's not easy to look at your "baby" with tears in his eyes and support that "mean old coach". It's hard, but try to encourage team spirit, help him cheer for his friends, and let him know that with hard work he too can earn a relay spot. If your child has a problem with swimming, encourage him to take the responsibility of talking to his coach. This can be a positive learning experience and a real step toward growing up for a young person. This is one of the rewards of being involved in a swimming program.

Planning for the meet: You should receive directions to the pool either through the bulletin board, the newsletter, or a special notice sent home with swimmers. In addition you should know the warm-up time and plan on being to the pool at least 30 minutes before warm-up so your swimmer can calmly change into his suit, speak with friends, greet the coach, and participate in team stretching before the actual in-water warm-up time begins.

When packing for the meet, be sure your swimmer includes team swimsuit, extra suit for warm-ups or emergencies, 2 team caps, 2 pair of goggles, waterproof sun screen, towels, dry clothes for after the meet, and a water bottle. Other items include books, games, cards, radio/headset, blanket or sleeping bag, shampoo, and soap. Healthy snacks of fruit and grains will help maintain energy levels throughout the session.

If your swimmer is swimming in the morning session, have him pack his bags the night before.

Parents, too, need to plan ahead. Some things you will appreciate having include money, map, cooler, book, pen/pencil, lawn chairs, sun glasses, and sun block. On very hot days, dress appropriately and perhaps bring a swim suit. Some meets allow parents to cool off in the diving well, kiddy pool or shallow end. If they don't, you can always jump in a cool shower - in either case, you will be grateful for a swim suit.

Most USAS meets have concessions that serve anything from doughnuts and coffee to nacho chips, pizza, hot dogs, sandwiches and salads. You won't go hungry, although at the end of a 3 day meet you might be a bit poorer.

Expect to pay an admission fee of anywhere from a dollar to two dollars per adult (swimmers and younger children are free). Heat sheets (program) will also be available at an additional cost. Some sheets will cover all weekend, every session, some will be mornings or afternoons for the whole weekend, and others may be for just one session. The price will vary

depending upon how much is included. It is a good idea to buy one so you can see what events your swimmer is in, where he is seeded in his event, and help you to keep track of what's happening.

For those parents who live to SHOP there will probably be concessionaires from swim shops with many items to purchase such as goggles (when the emergency ones from home are lost or broken), swim suits (sale and expensive), t-shirts, bags, and an assortment of swimming paraphernalia. Some shops take bank cards, some only checks and cash. Come prepared. Setting some spending guidelines at home before the meet might help avoid clashes with your swimmer at the meet.

What to expect during the meet: During the warm-up you can study the heat sheet and find your swimmer's events. You will note that there could be 50 or more other swimmers in the same event. Since everyone cannot possibly swim at the same time, the event will be swum in heats of 6 - 8 swimmers depending on the number of lanes in the pool. Heats are swum from slowest seed time to fastest in timed final meets. Hopefully your swimmer will be in a heat with other swimmers who swim approximately as fast as he does. In a timed finals meet swimmers swim only once in each event. The final result of the event is based on the times for everyone who swam the event. It is possible for a swimmer to win his heat (a neat accomplishment) but not place in the top 6 or 8. Final results for the event will be posted somewhere (ask) so your swimmer can check his official time and place.

In a trials and finals meet the fastest 6, 8, 12, 18, or 24 swimmers from the preliminary heats in each event return for the finals usually in the evening. In the finals there will often be two heats, the final heat consisting of the fastest 6 or 8 swimmers, and a consolation heat with the next 6 to 8 fastest swimmers. In some senior meets a third final heat called the bonus final is also offered. Swimmer's cannot move up in place beyond their heat regardless of time. A swimmer who wins the consolation final with a time faster than the last place finisher in the final heat cannot move ahead of the finals swimmer. Confused? Ask the coach!

And finally, the best advice of all: as parents, try to stress your swimmer's personal accomplishments - best times, first time, and so on. Don't make too big a deal about awards one way or another.