

Meets 101: A Short Course for the New Swim Family

Swim meets are a great family experience! They're a place where the whole family can spend time together. Listed below are some guidelines geared to help you through your first couple of swim meets. First year-round swim meets may seem a little overwhelming - often there are many swimmers and parents, many officials and coaches, a lot of noise, a lot of heat, and little handholding available for the younger swimmers, but if you have any questions, please ask! Pretty soon it will all make sense.

WHAT TO TAKE TO THE MEET

- Most importantly do not forget to bring your swimmer's swimsuit and SST cap, goggles and SST t-shirts and jackets if you have them. Believe it or not, swimmers do forget to bring their suits to both practices and meets.
- Towels... your swimmer will be at the meet for a while so pack at least two or three.
- Something to sit on, like a sleeping bag, old blanket, or anything that will provide a little padding between the swimmer and the hard pool deck. The swimmers will be spending a lot of time on it. Some venues allow folding chairs for spectators, in addition to providing bleacher seating.
- Warm-up clothes or parka are very common. Each swimmer may want to bring two because these items can get wet and soggy. Parents, on the other hand, should be aware that an enclosed pool area can get very warm, and those who are not wet from swimming can get very hot, so dress accordingly!
- Travel games, coloring books, books, electronics, or anything to pass the time while sitting or lying down to rest for later events.
- Each swimmer is usually allowed to bring a small cooler or snacks. They usually have snack bars at the meet, but the lines can be long and sometimes they only sell junk food. Suggestions for items to bring are fruits and vegetables, protein drinks, sports drinks, bottled water, energy bars, yogurt, cereal, sandwiches, pasta salad, carrots, and bagels.
- Don't forget to bring money. The host team will sell heat sheets, which are almost a mandatory purchase, as well as other items like t-shirts and other

meet souvenirs. Vendors of swim paraphernalia often set up at meets, and if you didn't have the time or energy to get a cooler together, you may need to patronize the host team's or aquatic center's concessions stand (and sometimes concessionaires do have swimmer friendly food).

Once you have attended one or two meets this will all become very routine. Please do not hesitate to ask any other Savannah Swim Team parent for help or information! These meets are a lot of fun for the swimmers! They get to visit with their friends, play games, and meet kids from other teams. They also get to “race” and see how much they have improved from all the hard work they have put in at practice.

BEFORE THE MEET STARTS

- Arrive at the pool at least 15 minutes before the scheduled warm-up time begins. The warm-up time will be listed in the meet information.
- Upon arrival, find a place to put your swimmer's blankets, swim bags, and blankets or sleeping bags. The team usually sits together in one area so look for some familiar faces.
- Purchase a heat sheet (meet program) and look up the events in which your swimmer is entered. Highlighting each of your swimmer's events is helpful. It allows both you and your swimmer to follow along as the meet progresses and helps ensure a swimmer does not miss his or her event. In many USA Swimming meets, a swimmer who misses his or her heat may not be allowed to swim in another heat, even if there is an empty lane. **It is the swimmer's responsibility to be behind the swimming blocks for his or her heat, not the coach's.**
- If your swimmer is worried about remembering the events, write each event number and lane number on the back of your swimmer's hand, forearm, or thigh (example: E3 H4 L2 50 FR for event 3, heat 4, lane 2, 50 freestyle). This may seem silly, but you'll see most swimmers do this because it helps them remember which events they are swimming and what event number to listen for. Even if your swimmer can't yet follow along, this is good practice for when he or she is older.
- Swimmers should report to the Clerk of Course to check in for any deck-seeded events (usually distance events) in which they may be entered to swim.

- Your swimmer now gets his or her cap and goggles and reports to the pool deck and/or coach for warm-up instructions. It is very important for all swimmers to warm-up with the team. Swimmer's 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.
- After warm-up, swimmers return to the area where their towels are and sit until their events are called. This is a good time for a bathroom break, a drink, or just settling in.
- The meet will usually start about 10-15 minutes after warm-ups are over.

WHEN THE MEET STARTS

- It is important for any swimmer to know what event numbers he or she is swimming (again, they should probably have the numbers written on the hand, arm, or thigh). He or she may swim right away after warm-up or may have to wait awhile.
- It is a swimmer's responsibility to watch the events and report behind the blocks several heats before his or her assigned heat. Swimmers should report wearing their caps and goggles, not holding them in their hands. Usually, girls' events are odd-numbered and boys' events are even-numbered. You can expect several heats of each event.
- The swimmer, under the direction of the Deck Referee and the Starter, swims the race.
- After each swim, the swimmer reports immediately to the coach. The coach will discuss the swim with each swimmer, after which parents should greet their swimmer positively and enthusiastically *regardless of what occurred during their race*. The coaching staff will already have discussed stroke technique with the swimmer, but parents should convey how proud they are of the swimmer's efforts. The swimmer now relaxes (and usually eats and drinks) until his or her next event.
- When a swimmer has completed all of his or her individual events, the swimmer ***may have more swimming***. **Please check with the coach before leaving to make sure the swimmer is not included on a relay team.** Often, swimmers are entered only into individual events prior to the meet,

and only those events are printed in the heat sheet. Coaches typically wait until during the meet to put together the relay teams, waiting to see who is actually at the meet. It is not fair to other swimmers who may have stayed to swim on a relay if your swimmer leaves the venue before a relay race in which he or she may have been entered.

- Awards (ribbons, medals, and trophies) are collected by the coach or assigned parent at the end of the meet and distributed several days after the meet is over. Each and every award is special to the swimmer, so please display them proudly at home. The types and amount of awards are determined by the host team and described in the meet information. Sometimes there are special awards such as “high point” for boys and girls.
- **Special Note: According to USAS rules, parents are not allowed “on deck” unless they are serving in an official capacity** (this is required by USA Swimming's insurance). It should also be noted that all questions concerning officials' calls, meet results, or the conduct of the meet, should be referred to the coaching staff who will pursue the matter with the proper officials. **Under no circumstances may a swimmer or parent argue with a meet official.** If the coaches in attendance at the meet feel that action should be taken, then only the coaches may take action.

Very Basic Swimming Rules

- Starts: the swimmers are not allowed to false start (leaving the blocks before the Starter's command). If they jump the start, whether intentionally or not, they will be disqualified at the end of the race.
- Freestyle: the swimmer must touch the wall at the turn.
- Backstroke: at the finish, a swimmer must be on his or her back. Rules for turns are complicated.
- Breaststroke and Butterfly: swimmers have to touch *with both hands at the same time*. A swimmer may not freestyle-kick at any time, and both arms must move in unison.

Out of Town Meets

Trips to meets in other cities become an important aspect of a swimmer's career while advancing through the age group ranks. Parents are encouraged to attend out-of-town meets with their swimmers and to chaperone other youngsters if that's what it takes to allow that swimmer to compete. These trips can be a lot of fun for parents and swimmers alike. They also are a rare opportunity to participate in a special way in each young swimmer's career. Information about lodging is often sent out on "Streamlines" in time for parents to make hotel reservations at the team hotel. Families are encouraged but not required to stay in the team hotel.