

EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT SWIM MEETS . . .

To the uninitiated, a swim meet can look – and sound – chaotic. In reality, well-run swim meets are highly structured and “designed to provide fair and equitable conditions of competition and promote uniformity in the sport so that no swimmer shall obtain unfair advantage over another.”* And the basics of year-round swimming competition in the United States, Georgia, and Savannah are easily understood if one is armed with a few facts.

The Purpose. SST swimmers, families and coaches attend an average of one meet per month hosted by other swim teams in our area (which is bounded generally by Jacksonville, Florida to the south, Atlanta to the west, and Columbia, South Carolina to the north). Participating in meets gives swimmers a chance to measure the progress they have made in training and test themselves against a wide range of competitors.

SST hosts several meets throughout the year. Meet fees are a significant source of revenue for our non-profit team, enabling SST to keep training fees some of the lowest in the area. Further, we believe that it is an important part of our organization’s mission to promote the sport of competitive, year-round swimming for all Savannah swimmers, to provide the community at large with an opportunity to take part as spectators in an exciting sport, and to give something back to the taxpayers who have provided the swimming community with a superior facility in which training and competition can take place.

The Rules. In competition, the four basic strokes of competitive swimming – freestyle, breaststroke, backstroke, butterfly – must be performed in a manner prescribed in the rules and regulations of USA Swimming, the national governing body of swimming headquartered at One Olympic Plaza, Colorado Springs, Colorado. Rules for individual medley (IM) – an event combining all four strokes – and free and medley relays are also outlined.

Savannah Swim Team is a club member of USA Swimming, and all SST athletes and volunteer certified officials are individual members of USA Swimming. Savannah Swim Team is also a member of Georgia Swimming which sets state time standards, trains all USA Swimming-certified officials in its member clubs, and sanctions all USA Swimming meets held in Georgia (upon satisfaction of certain requirements and conditions, and payment of a sanctioning fee).

The Seasons. The short course season (yards) runs from September until March, with meets held in 25-yard pools. The long course season (meters) runs from April until August, with meets often held outdoors in 50-meter (Olympic size) pools. Each season has its own championship meet towards the end of the season.

The Events. A typical meet includes over one hundred events of various distances in all four strokes plus IM and relays. Men and women, boys and girls, compete separately but in identical events. A weekend-long meet generally includes five sessions: Friday evening, Saturday morning, Saturday afternoon, Sunday morning, and Sunday afternoon. Usually, but not always, swimmers 12 and under compete in the morning sessions, and swimmers 13 and over compete in afternoon sessions. Friday evening sessions are often reserved for long distance events.

Swimmers participate in 3 to 5 events per session (not counting relays), based on their ages and specialties. For example, swimmers 8 years old and younger swim 25- and 50-yard events, while swimmers 9 to 12 years old participate mostly in 50- and 100-yard events. After age 13, the only 50-yard or 50-meter event is the freestyle, and longer distance events like the 800/1000- and 1500/1650-meters/yards are added.

The Age Groups and Achievement Levels. USA Swimming recognizes the following age groups: 10 & Under, 11-12, 13-14, 15-16, 17-18, and Senior/Open. At meets which are not state championship level or above, sometimes 6 & Under and 8 & Under age categories are also provided. The senior/open category is open to a swimmer of any age who has achieved the qualifying time (if any) required for the event.

Annually, USA Swimming publishes nationally recognized levels of achievement for each age group in each stroke. A swimmer begins at the “C” level, and as his or her times drop advances through the “B”, “BB”, “A”, “AA”, “AAA”, and “AAAA” (quad-A) times. This fosters fair yet challenging competition on all age and ability levels. In some cases, a swimmer may be in a different class in each stroke, for example, a “C” swimmer in breaststroke, a “B” in freestyle, and an “AA” in backstroke. State championship qualifying times (Q1 times) in Georgia generally fall between “A” and “AA” standards. Georgia All-Stars are swimmers who achieve “AAA” or better times in at least one event.

Not all age group classifications are offered at every swim meet. **The swimmer's age on the first day of a meet will govern the swimmer's age for the entire meet.** Some swim meets have certain qualification standards. In order to swim in a certain classification, a swimmer must have achieved the qualifying time for that particular classification.

Timed Finals vs. Prelims/Finals Competition. In a timed finals meet, events are swum in a succession of heats, and final placings are determined by the times performed. In a prelims/finals meet (generally used for state championships and above), heats are swum to determine the top 8 or 10 swimmers (depending on the number of lanes in the pool), and final placement is determined by those swimmers competing in a “finals” heat, usually at night on the same day the prelims are swum. Sometimes the next fastest group of 8 or 10 swimmers will compete in a consolation heat as well.

Seeding. Generally speaking, swimmers are seeded in their events at their previous best times, provided to the host team at the time of entry into the meet. “Circle seeding” is a special seeding arrangement used in the three fastest preliminary heats of events at prelims/finals meets; detailed information on USA Swimming seeding formulas is available from the clerk of course at a meet or *in USA Swimming Rules and Regulations*.

Officials and Other Volunteers. Disqualifications occur when swimmers fail to perform according to the rules published by USA Swimming. Officials note and act upon infractions also according to procedures established by USA Swimming. Officials needed to run a swim meet include the following: meet referee, deck referee, administrative referee, starter, one to three timers per lane, head timer, timing judge, relay take-off judges, clerk of course, several stroke and turn judges, chief judge, announcer, timing equipment operator, computer operator, and safety marshal. All meet officials are recognizable by their blue and white uniforms.

Traditionally, the host team provides breakfast, lunch, and in the case of prelims/finals meets, supper too, for all officials and coaches. “Hospitality” volunteers also provide water and drinks to all volunteers working on the pool deck during meet sessions, and still other volunteers may work at concessions and serve as runners. Obviously, between trained officials and

other volunteers, a sizeable, skilled volunteer force is needed to make a meet run smoothly, and someone to pull it all together. Typically, an experienced, longtime SST volunteer parent serves as meet director, coordinating the 75-100 volunteers working at every meet. See below, “Who's Who at the Meet”, for more detailed information about meet functions.

*Barzdukas, Arvydas *et al.*, eds. *1999 USA Swimming Rules and Regulations*. Colorado Springs: USA Swimming, 1999.

WHO'S WHO AT THE MEET

Did you know that it takes a minimum of 1,000 volunteers hours on the pool deck to run a swim meet? And for a meet like Carey Hilliard's that number is doubled! So many hours are required because sanctioned swim meets must be run according to the rules established by USA Swimming.

Newcomers to year-round swimming are often overwhelmed by the number of people on deck and the apparent confusion – but there is order in the chaos! All officials are certified by USA Swimming, through Georgia Swimming, Inc., after training and apprenticeship in their respective jobs (timers and computer operators do not have to be certified, though timers may be, and computer operators may be certified in “admin.”). **Here's a guide to the key players on the “wet side” of a meet.**

- The **Meet Referee** is ultimately responsible for the safe and fair conduct of the meet, and supervises the conduct of all officials and volunteers. The Meet Referee interacts with both officials and coaches whenever problems arise. The Meet Referee is the final authority for any situation arising at a meet.
- Before the meet even starts, the **Safety Marshal**, under the supervision of the Meet Referee, enforces warm-up procedures and monitors the pool for safe conditions. You'll see the Safety Marshal wearing an orange vest.
- Once the meet begins, the **Deck Referee** oversees smooth running of the heats, clearing the pool for the starter after each heat, and assigning Stroke & Turn judges at each end of the course.
- The **Starter** interacts with the swimmers and timers to cause the take-off of each heat.
- The **Automatic Timing Operator (ATO)** acts in concert with the Starter to engage the timing system and observes closely for bad finish touches on the electronic pads.
- The **Stroke & Turn** judges observe the swimmers and raise their hands to let the **Chief Judge**, if there is one, or the Deck Referee know of any disqualifications (“DQ”). The Chief Judge or Stroke & Turn judge communicates the disqualification to the swimmer.
- The **Administrative Referee** is responsible for ensuring that the posted event results are accurate as to times and finish places.
- The Administrative Referee, or **Timing Judge** if there is one, ascertains whether or not the automatic timing system is functioning properly, and uses the timers' back-up times if needed.

- The **Computer Operator** runs the software that causes the final results to be printed out.
- The Meet Referees, Administrative Referees, and Deck Referees depend on the **Clerk of Course** to take late entries and scratches, and advise them of the changes before the start of each session. The Clerk of Course monitors the seeding and check-in processes for deck-seeded and positive check-in events and also sees that the results are posted.
- The **Press Steward**, or team spokesperson, conveys accurate information to any media representatives visiting the meet, and assists them in locating any coaches or swimmers they wish to interview, as well as in generating story ideas.

The host team is often assisted by many visiting officials. At state championship meets, the Meet Referee and other lead officials are appointed by Georgia Swimming. Most officials in our division in coastal Georgia are very familiar with each other, having worked together at many meets. As a general rule, non-certified volunteers should defer to certified officials in regard to all aspects of the conduct of the meet, and certified officials should act according to their position in the swimming official's hierarchy as described above. Sometimes, visiting officials do not treat our volunteers in the way that we would wish. Should you ever have a problem with a visiting official, the best course of action is to communicate with the meet referee or meet director. If the meet referee is a visitor, please express your concern to an SST certified referee. He or she, or SST's meet director, will try to resolve the situation.

Though the “wet side” of a meet is important, the “dry side” is no less so, because without the many functions under meet director, the meet simply could not be carried out: planning, budget, facility arrangements, mailings, entries, volunteers, hospitality, heat sheets, concierge, talent, t-shirts, concessions, publicity, and awards. These functions entail yeoman's work behind the scenes, hard work that keeps swimming affordable and available, and has a major economic impact on our community through the many thousands of visitors that converge at the aquatic center for meets.

