

# A GUIDE FOR NEW SWIM PARENTS

Welcome to Team Sopris Swimming. The primary mode of communication is electronic. Check your e-mail and the Team Sopris website ([www.teamsopris.org](http://www.teamsopris.org)) frequently. We will also post important news items on our Team Sopris Facebook page, which you can find by visiting the team website.

USA Swimming has some great information on their website ([www.usaswimming.org](http://www.usaswimming.org)). Go to the top menu and click on PARENTS. They have done a great job explaining the sport of swimming.

Our team is a member of the Western Slope League (WSL) of swim team. You can visit their website ([www.westernslopeleague.org](http://www.westernslopeleague.org)) for meet and training camp information.

Talk to other Sopris parents at practices and meets. Make friends. (Wearing your Sopris gear at meets makes you easier to find!) Ask for help if you do not understand something. Get phone numbers of other swimmers and their families in case of emergencies or to help with meets. Experienced parents remember what it was like to be new to the sport and are glad to help.

Here are some valuable tips from seasoned swim parents:

## ***Swim Bags and Packing for Meets***

### BASIC SWIM BAG:

1. Each swimmer should have a swim bag.
2. Label everything your child brings with them with both their name and team name.
3. If your child has asthma, make sure they have their inhaler. Make sure the coach knows they have asthma and where they keep their inhaler.
4. Bring water and/or sports drinks.
5. Bring flip-flops for the pool deck and showers. Swimmers need to protect their feet.

### ADDITIONAL ITEMS FOR MEETS:

1. Carry an extra pair of goggles, strap, cap and swimsuit in their bag. It can be more expensive to replace these at the meets if they should break and you need one fast. (Not all meets have vendors where you can make an emergency purchase.)
2. Bring at least two large towels. Most swimmers like one for after warm-ups and then another one for after their events.
3. Bring healthy snacks and extra drinks in a small cooler or swim bag. Good items include protein bars, bagels, granola snacks, nuts, crackers, and fresh fruit cut in pieces.
4. Bring a warm clothes for when you are not swimming. Cold muscles do not perform as well. Cotton - when it gets wet, it stays wet forever.
5. To keep them dry, pack clothes for wearing home or going out to eat in large plastic bags.
6. Pack a few dollars so you don't have to find a parent if you want something from the snack bar.
7. Pack something to keep them entertained. Make sure it is not something they will be too upset about if they lose it. If they bring electronics, remind them to put it away when they leave so someone will not walk on it or away with it. A deck of cards is a popular item.
8. Bring a folding chair.
9. If the meet will be held outside (usually just 50-meter pools in the summer), make sure your swimmer has shaded/mirrored goggles for swimming backstroke.
10. For outdoor meets, bring ample dry towels and warm clothes: parkas, hats, gloves, warm socks and shoes. Even in June and July, it can be very chilly during early morning warm-ups or late evening finals. Over a three-day meet, the weather can change drastically. Be prepared for rain no matter what the weatherman says. Also be prepared for sunny and hot with sunglasses, visors, and plenty of sunscreen.

## **USA Swimming Organization**

1. USA Swimming is a national organization. The country is divided into four Zones (Eastern, Central, Western, and Southern).
2. Each Zone is composed of Local Swim Committees (LSC). LSC's are roughly equivalent to states. Each swimming team belongs to one and only one LSC.
3. Our swimming club, the Sopris Barracudas, is a member of the Colorado Swimming LSC. The Colorado LSC is in the Western Zone.

## **Swimming Seasons**

1. The short course season (meets swum in 25-yard pools) typically runs from September through April. The season wraps up with the Speedo Championship Series Wisconsin Sectionals.
2. The long course season (meets swum in 50-meter pools) typically runs from May through July, with Western Zones and Sectionals in late July or early August.
3. Except for the few swimmers who qualify for zone, sectionals, or national competitions, most teams and swimmers take a break for August.

## **Basic Time Standards**

1. The time standards that we use are available on the USA Swimming website. Click Times/Time Standards on the main menu; then Time Standards. Then go to "A/B (the one you need) Motivational Times".
2. Your child must swim an event without getting disqualified to get a time. Then take that time and look at the time standards table.
3. First you must make sure that you use the correct table. Times are reported in SCY (Short Course Yards, events swum in a 25-yard pool), SCM (Short Course Meters, 25-meter pool), and LCM (Long Course Meters, 50-meter pool.). Most of the meets we have in the fall will be SCY.
4. Find your child's age and sex and then look for their event. Now find their time. If their time is slower than the first time listed, they have a "C" time. The other times are B, BB, A, AA, AAA, and AAAA, with AAAA times being the fastest time listed.
5. If you have an 8 and younger swimmer, use the 10 and under time standards.
6. If your child's time is listed as NT in a meet sign-up or heat sheet, it means they have "no time" established in that event.
7. When your child "ages up" (i.e., has a birthday and graduates to the next age group), the times they swam when younger are still valid although the classification might change. For example, a child who has a BB time as a 10-year-old might drop to a B time when he/she turns eleven.
8. Unlike most summer leagues, there is no "age cut off date" in USA swimming. You are as old as you are on the day of the meet. You do not, however, age up during a meet. Usually the cut off is the child's age on the first day of the meet; this is stated in the meet announcement.

## **Other Time Standards & Age Group Information**

1. You may hear parents and coaches talking about other time standards such as All-Stars cuts, zone cuts, sectional cuts, etc. This section will give you a little background.
2. The vast majority of swimmers under the age of eighteen swim in the "age group" category. In this category, qualifying times for meets are based on the age of your child. All of the above information on time standards is based on age groups.
3. Most swim meets have the following age groups: 10 & under, 11-12, 13-14, and either 15-18 or OPEN. If the age group is 15-18, then only swimmers of that age may swim. If the age group is OPEN, then any registered swimmer who meets the entrance criteria may swim. You may see older swimmers (college kids, adults) in this age group or you may see young swimmers who cannot swim this event in their own age group. For example, a meet may not offer a 200 butterfly to 11-12 swimmers. A twelve-year-old could elect to swim this event in the OPEN age group.
4. There are also meets on the schedule referred to as "mini" meets. "Mini" refers to the size of the competitors, not the length of the meet! These meets are usually restricted to the youngest swimmers. Often these meets offer events appropriate for young, beginning swimmers (e.g., 25 yard free, back, breast,

and fly) and additional age groups (e.g., 6 & under, 7-8) that allow the youngsters to place and earn ribbons without competing against 10-year-olds.

- 5 The Western Zone Long Course (around August) Age Group Championships are prestigious events usually held in the northwest U.S. Swimmers qualify during the long course season by beating the published time standards for each event. These times are typically published on the CSI web site at the beginning of the long course season.
- 6 You may also see time standards labeled T16. This stands for Top 16 reportable time. USA Swimming publishes yearly the top sixteen swimmers nationwide in each event in each age group. If your swimmer achieves a T16 time, it means that their time will be reported to USA swimming for possible inclusion on this list (depending on how many other kids across the nation swam faster).
- 7 Then there is another category of meets for which age is irrelevant. There is a qualifying time for each event, regardless of age. (There are different times for males and females, however). One of these meets is Sectionals. Officially, the name of this meet is now Speedo Championship Series Wisconsin Sectionals, but you still hear people talk about Sectionals. There are also meets above that level at both the national (e.g., U.S. Open, Olympic Trials) and international (e.g., FINA World Championships, Olympics) levels. Obviously, the qualifying times get tougher and tougher as the swimmer progresses. This information doesn't apply to the vast majority of us parents, but it's nice to know what somebody else is talking about!

## ***Preparing for Meets***

1. Do not feel that you must go to every one of the meets on the schedule. Talk to your child's coach about which meets would be best for your child.
2. If you plan to attend meets more than two hours away, consider getting a hotel room. The host team will often publish a list of hotels, but it is up to each parent to make their own reservations. The team does not block rooms for meets. If your child does not qualify, you can always cancel the reservation.
3. Read the meet announcement (usually published on the Web site 4-6 weeks in advance of the meet). Be sure to note what time your children will be swimming: morning, afternoon, evening or maybe all three if you have swimmers in more than one age group. Remember that coaches must enter swimmers a few weeks before the meet. Once your child is entered, you will be charged the entry fees whether your child swims or not.
4. The coaches will pick your child's events. Parents do not get to pick events. Coaches have a plan for the season and make entries based on the goals they have for your swimmer. Coaches are open to suggestions.
5. Some meets have relays. These are a lot of fun for the kids. Coaches will pick the swimmers for relays. If you know you have time constraints and probably cannot stay for relays, please notify the coach. Make sure that your swimmer checks with the coach about their relay status before you leave; often the relays get switched around at meets. If a swimmer leaves before a scheduled relay, not only do you leave three teammates high and dry, but also the team and ultimately the parents get charged for an event that is not swum.
6. When the meet entries are posted, make sure that your child is entered in events that they can be entered in legally. If your child has an "A" time in an event and the meet announcement is for BB and slower, bring it to the coach's attention. They will not be allowed to swim the event without being disqualified.

## ***Meet Etiquette***

1. There are two basic meet formats: timed finals format and prelims/finals format. The format will be specified in the meet announcement. In a timed finals format (most of our meets fall in this category), swimmers are seeded from slowest to fastest for each event with NT swimmers swimming first. You swim the event once; your finish is based on your time.
2. In a prelims/finals format, there are one or more sessions of preliminaries during the morning/early afternoon and a finals session in the evening. The fastest swimmers at preliminaries return to swim at night. (There is no additional fee for swimming the event again at finals.) Preliminaries are often seeded a little differently from timed finals meets. The slower heats are seeded normally, but the fastest two or three heats are seeded with the #1 seed in the last heat, the #2 seed in the second-to-last heat, etc. The top seeds therefore end up in middle lanes (preferred) in one of the fastest heats. Regardless of

which heat your child swims, the fastest swimmers in preliminaries return to finals. The numbers of swimmers who return is specified in the meet announcement. It is dependent of the number of lanes in the pool (enough swimmers to fill one heat) and whether or not there are one or more consolation finals (a second or third heat of swimmers). For example, a meet could offer eight-lane championship finals for 11-12 and 13-14 swimmers and a consolation final and championship final for 15-18. Those placing first through eighth in prelims in the younger age groups would return. In the 15-18 age group, ninth through sixteenth would swim in consolation finals, and first through eighth would swim in championship finals. The prelims time is used for seeding the swimmers at finals. Where you finish in your finals heat is your place. An interesting note: The top finisher in consolation finals in the above example is in ninth place, even if he/she swims faster than the last place finisher in the championship finals (eighth place). Once a swimmer has made championship finals in this example, he/she is assured of at least eighth place assuming it's a legal swim. You will see the most experienced competitors swimming well enough in preliminaries to make finals but saving their best swims for that evening. If your swimmer is disqualified at finals, they do not place.

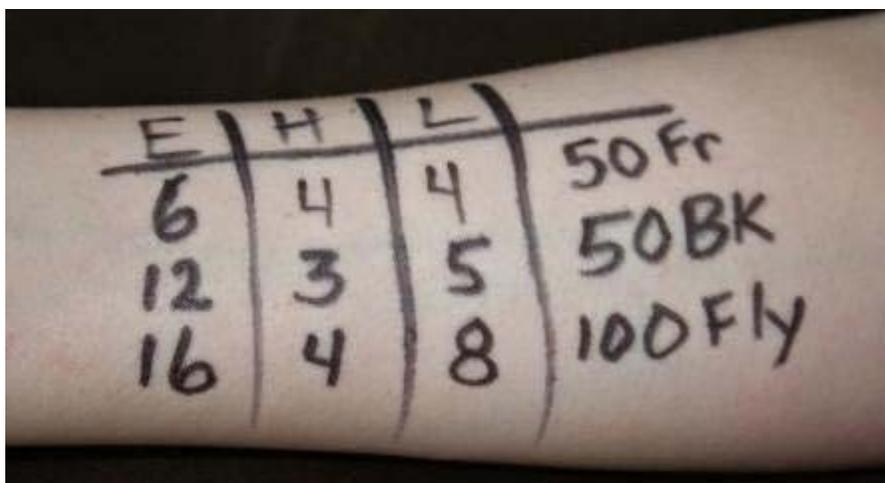
3. As you can imagine from the above description, swimming at finals is fun for the swimmers. If you are attending a prelims/finals format meet, you should plan for the possibility that your swimmer will make finals. If you know he/she cannot swim that evening, you should inform the coach in advance. Otherwise, swimmers who make finals are expected to swim. During the prelims sessions, those who are swimming at finals plus a few (usually two) alternates are announced. Unless the swimmer follows the proper "scratch" procedures (see meet announcement and coach for details), finalists and alternates are expected to return for finals. The team is fined if someone who was supposed to swim does not show up. This is a big no-no!! Also, in the prelims/finals format, relays are usually swum during the evening finals session.
4. If you are attending a multi-day and/or prelims/finals meet, be prepared to rest between sessions. Relaxing in a hotel room or spending the afternoon at the movie theater is much better than shopping at the mall.
5. Arrive at least 15 minutes prior to the warm-up time that is posted for your session at the meet. Young swimmers should come ready to swim by being in their suits. Locate a coach and check in. (Not all coaches go to every meet so learn the names of coaches other than your own.) Make sure your swimmer has his or her swim bag, snacks/drinks, and chair.
6. If your child is swimming an event requiring a "positive check-in" (specified in the meet announcement), he/she should verify with the coach that the check-in is done. Sometimes the swimmer does it, and sometimes the coach handles it for all swimmers. Positive check-in events are usually the long events (e.g., 400 IM, 500 free, 1000 free) or, at some meets, all events over 200 yards or meters. This eliminates heats with multiple no-shows, thus significantly shortening the meet for all swimmers and spectators. After the check-in period has elapsed, the heat and lane assignments for the event are posted.
7. Some of the meets will have heating areas set up for younger children (12 and younger). At these meets, the younger swimmers must report to the official at the heating area before heading to the blocks for their events. Check with the coach about whether the meet you are attending will have a separate heating area.
8. Make sure your child knows not to leave the pool deck (for either a few minutes or the rest of the day) without telling the coach. Parents are not allowed on the pool deck. At larger meets, we will pair up our senior swimmers with our new and younger swimmers to ensure they get to their events in time.
9. USA Swimming is very serious about no parents on deck. If you feel that you really must be on deck, become trained as an official or volunteer as a timer. If you think that your child is not old enough to be there without you, maybe you should reconsider entering them in meets. Some of our meets can only be viewed from the deck in designated areas only. There will be signs indicating the viewing area and the areas designated for coaches and swimmers only.
10. Competition swimsuits should fit very snugly. Female swimmers need to pull their straps off of their shoulders except when they are swimming. If not, their back muscles may cramp up, making it difficult to swim. If you see your daughter walking around like this, there's a good reason!
11. If you are asked to be a timer, be sure that you show up on time. You should wear shoes that will not be ruined if they get wet. Be sure that you attend the timer's briefing at the beginning of the session.

12. Swim meets can be very long and very boring if you do not have something to do. Bring young siblings as a last resort. If you do bring young children, make sure you bring ample entertainment for them.
13. Indoor pools and surrounding decks are notoriously warm. Bring clothes to change into that would be appropriate for summer. Some are cool. Bottom line: be prepared either way.
14. Often there is an area where you can set up chairs or blankets outside of the pool area. You must bring your own. Do not bring items that you would be upset about if they go missing or if someone else walks on them.
15. Bring food. Most meets have concession stands, but the costs add up. Swimmers will already have their own coolers packed with nutritious snacks and plenty of drinks. Limit the amount of money per day your child gets to spend at the concession stand. Most pools allow small lunch bags or coolers for spectators as well. Remember that alcoholic beverages are not allowed.
16. Be sure you leave your area cleaner than you found it. You will really appreciate those who pick up after themselves when we host a meet! This applies to both swimmers and spectators leaving the pool area.
17. Pack a permanent marker to mark your swimmers events on their arm or leg and a highlighter to mark your Heat Sheet with your swimmers events, and the other team swimmers so you can follow and cheer during the meet.
18. Buy or borrow a heat sheet and write your child's event, heats, and lanes on their hand with a permanent marker. The host team usually has them for sale or they may be FREE on Meet Mobile. If your child is swimming at finals, heat sheets for those sessions are available that evening.
19. Meets are opportunities to measure how your swimmer is doing in their training at that moment. Nearly every swimmer has a bad swim or meet occasionally. If your child is DQ'd (disqualified), it is not the end of the world. Almost every swimmer has been disqualified at least once. As a parent you must ensure that your child has a positive experience even if they do not swim well. Remember that our children learn values and sportsmanship from us. Coaches go to meets to coach and parents should go to meets to cheer, offer love, and encouragement.

### ***How to Mark a Hand at Meets***

The strokes are abbreviated with the following initials: FR – freestyle, BK – backstroke, BR –breaststroke, FL – butterfly, and IM for individual medley. One way is to draw with permanent makers a small graph on their hand using just the initials for each of the following:

D – (distance)	S – (stroke)	E- (event)	H – (heat)	L –(lane)
50	FR	7	3	8
25	FL	23	5	1



For example, one child's hand may have the following:

E-11 100BK H-6 L-5

E-29 50FR H-4 L-1

E-43 100IM H-1 L-6

Another way to write the same information is:

#11 100BK H6/L5

#29 50FR H4/L1

#43 100IM H1/L6

Some of the older swimmers only put the event/heat/lane. This really helps the younger swimmers get to the right lane. By marking your swimmers events somewhere on them, allows anyone on the pool deck to look at their hand and help them get to where they need to go.