

Swim Team Survival Guide – Frequently Asked Questions

Copied and Adapted with permission from Anne Studstill – Avondale Estates Swim Team

Several years ago I almost didn't sign up my oldest child for swim team because it seemed way too intense. All those kids in matching bathing suits seemed so confident....was it some kind of clique? Well, someone talked me into trying it just to make her a better swimmer and we never looked back. That first season was a ton of fun for my child, although I found the meets to be a bit overwhelming. Now that we have finished a few seasons, I will say that it seems much less chaotic and is more fun for me as well (especially when we have plenty of volunteers).

I have been pleasantly surprised by what a wonderful experience swim team has been for my children. Avondale Estates is a community where children are at a multitude of school situations. Swim team is a great place for them to come together for a common goal. It builds their bodies, develops character, and is a great way to meet new friends (that goes for parents as well as kids). I hope you will join with me in working to keep our program strong and fun for everyone this season.

As one of the swim team coordinators, I thought it would be helpful to write this guide for people coming into swim team to better prepare them for the meets and to help them understand the volunteer positions. You may want to hang onto this and refer to it over your first season as you figure out what the heck is going on!

– Anne Studstill



Gainsborough Stingrays FAQ

Q. What is a swim meet, and how many are there?

A. A swim meet is an organized competition between swim teams. In our Atlanta Swim Association Swim League (ASA), each swim team participates in five regular season meets, each one against one other swim team (these are called dual meets), and the end-of-the-season Championship Meet that includes all teams in the league.

Q. How is a swim meet organized, and how long does it last?

A. A swim meet consists of 86 events. For example, event 1 is the 6 and under girls 100 yard free style relay. Individual events may have several heats (races) since there are often more kids swimming than there are lanes. In our pool, we only have five lanes, so if 9 kids are swimming in an event, there will be two heats. It usually takes about 3-4 hours to complete a swim meet.

Q. What events will my child swim in?

A. Events for children six and under include one relay and two individual races (free style and backstroke). All other age groups have two relays and five individual races (free, back, breast, butterfly, and individual medley or IM). Typically, children swim in 2 or 3 of the individual races and up to 2 relays.

Your child will swim in races with other children of the same gender, in the same age group. The only exception to this is when a child “swims up,” or participates in a race with older children in order to fill a spot to gain more points for the team. A swimmer is not allowed to “swim down” for obvious reasons.

You may request a specific event by asking the coaches, but please do not request that your child be removed from an event because they are not comfortable or proficient in their strokes. Summer league is a learning league and coaches are trying to broaden your child’s horizon. Coaches will not put your child in any events that they (the coaches) feel your child is incapable of swimming.

Q. Why isn’t my child swimming in a relay?

A. This is probably best explained by an example. Take the freestyle relay, for instance, in which four swimmers participate. If there are only three swimmers in your child’s age/gender group, then there are not enough to make a relay team. If there are more than four swimmers, but less than eight, then there are only enough swimmers to make one relay team. In the latter case, the swimmers with the top four individual freestyle times are chosen for the relay team.

Q. Does it matter what order the medley relay or the IM go in?

A. Yes. For the medley relay the order is back, breast, fly then free. For individual medley it is fly, back, breast then free.

Q. How can we tell who wins the meet?

A. In each event, coaches pick two swimmers (determined by past times) who are competing for points. They swim in the first race of an event (called a heat), which is the “Live” or “Points” heat. All other swimmers in the event are swimming “exhibition.” A swimmer’s time does not determine the order of finish. A finish judge for each team sits at the finish line and decides which swimmer was first, second and so on. Points for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd (1st and 2nd only on Relays) are assigned based on place and tallied up by the scorekeepers as the meet progresses. A team cannot “sweep” an event. If a team places 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, the opposing team’s fastest swimmer in that event will be awarded 3rd place and the corresponding point. In individual events, points awarded are 5, 3, and 1. In relay events – regardless of age – points awarded are 7 and 3. At the end of the meet, the team with the most points wins.

Q. How can I tell what event we are on?

A. Each pool should have a dynamic sign with the event number on it somewhere in plain sight. Also, the official (usually the person with a bullhorn that starts each race) will announce the event and heat before each race.

Q. Why do we have exhibition swimmers?

A. The kids can usually only compete for points in 2 individual events. Over the swim season they improve a lot, so the exhibition times are important in that they help the coaches track their progress. Please help your child understand that they should watch for and celebrate “best times”, which are their personal records in the each stroke. Their times will be on the ribbons that are given out a few days after each meet.

Q. My child got DQ’ed. What is that about?

A. For some of the strokes there are technical things that they legally can and can’t do. For example, in butterfly, their feet must stay together and they must touch the wall with 2 hands at the same time. If the official (provided by ASA) notices that a child is doing something illegal for that stroke, they can get disqualified or dq’ed. The coach can find out exactly what they did wrong so they can work on it for next time. We try to provide a ribbon to the child so that they still can track their time. Try not to make a big deal about this.

Q. What is the bullpen?

A. At the meets, we have 2 bullpens--the team bullpen and the race bullpen. The one where the kids hang out for most of the meet is the team bullpen area. Parent volunteers (Bullpen Wranglers) help the kids make sure they don't miss their events. A few minutes before their race, the kids move up to the race bullpen area and are turned over to the Deck Manager to call their name and line them up in the right spot.

One of the biggest headaches for our Bullpen Wranglers is hunting down little Johnny who's gone off to play in the sandbox, or get a snack, or go to the bathroom. Please help your child understand that they should stay in the team bullpen area during the meet so that they will not miss an event. If your child needs to leave the bullpen for any reason, they should inform the Bullpen Wrangler as to where they are going.

Q. Why are they writing on my child with a permanent marker?

A. As the kids get older, they will be responsible for getting to their own races. They need to be aware of how the meets work and what events they are swimming. Before the meet, coaches write "E", "H", "L" and "ST" with numbers on their arm or leg, oriented to the swimmer so that they can read it themselves and know what they are swimming. These letters stand for Event, Heat, Lane and Stroke.

E	H	L	St
			25
15	1	3	Free
			25
35	2	1	Back

Although not encouraged, kids will sometimes decorate themselves with sayings such as "Eat My Bubbles." If your child is so inclined, please ensure that the taunt is good natured and within good sportsmanship.

Don't worry; the ink will wear off in a day or so. We have had good luck taking off excessive writing with soap, baby oil, fingernail polish remover or GoJo.

Q. If I notice that my child is in the wrong lane, what do I do?

A. Often there are changes at the last minute that may affect heat and lane for a child's race. We like to combine heats whenever possible to make the meets run faster, and there may be substitutions because of absent swimmers.

If you think your child is in the wrong heat or lane for his/her race, ask the Head Coach or Deck Manager. Remember that what we write on their arm prior to the meet is not the final word on a child's heat/lane. The Deck Manager has the most current list of where the swimmer should be.

Q. What happens if it is raining; do they cancel the meet?

A. No. The meets are rarely cancelled because rescheduling is a nightmare. Please show up at the scheduled time unless you get an e-mail telling you otherwise. Thunder will delay a meet, but it will be run eventually, rain or shine. If a meet is interrupted by a thunderstorm, the swim team representatives from each team will meet and agree how to proceed. If the meet is over the half-way point, they may decide to stop and call a winner. If it looks like rain, be sure to bring umbrellas, rain slickers and extra towels for your swimmer as well as yourself.

Q. Do I have to stay for the entire meet?

A. Maybe. Our league orders events so that relays are swum at the beginning and again at the end of the meet. If your child is on a relay team that swims at the end of the meet, they must stay and swim or else that relay team cannot compete. Having a relay team member leave early is particularly disappointing to the other relay swimmers if they are planning to swim and are told at the last minute that they do not have enough swimmers to make a relay team.

You are encouraged to stay and cheer on our team through the end of the meet, but younger siblings may dictate that you must leave early. Unless you screw up a relay, you will be forgiven for not staying until the bitter end.

Q. My child has missed practice all week. Doesn't the coach know that we won't be at the meet?

A. No. Don't assume that coaches know your intentions. Often swimmers are involved in outside activities that make them miss practices off and on, but they still make it back to the meets. As soon as you know, please tell either coach, Lisa, or Neal if your child will not attend a meet. Use the coach's cell phone number on the day of the meet; email may be too slow.)

Also, if you are assigned a volunteer position, you are responsible for finding a replacement AND letting our Volunteer Coordinator know who your replacement is.

Q. I have other small children. Do I really have to volunteer?

A. Yes, we must have volunteers. A swim meet cannot run without enough volunteers to fill the positions. We are asking each family to please volunteer for at least 3 meets. If you have small children, make arrangements for your spouse/partner to watch your kids while you work the meet. If that is not possible, try to make arrangements with another parent to take turns watching the smaller children so that you each can volunteer. Or consider hiring a babysitter during the meet. If you are unsure of your ability to do a volunteer job, talk with the Volunteer Coordinator. They will help you find something that will work for your situation. If you can volunteer for more than 3 meets, please consider doing so.

Q. What about dinner? When should I feed my child at the meet?

A. That is a little tricky. There is always junk food around the meet no matter how much we try to avoid it. I usually feed my children a healthy protein snack (bananas and yogurt or something like that) right before the meet and bring or buy them something to eat during the meet. Please check with the bullpen parent if you are taking your child away from the bullpen to buy them food to make sure they will not miss their events. Also, use common sense here. Please do not feed your child right before they swim an event, especially an Individual Medley.

Q. We are missing a ribbon. How can I get it?

A. Write down your child's name, meet and event and give it to either the coach or the person in charge of ribbons. Sometimes these get misfiled. Sometimes there are substitutions that do not get caught before the ribbons are done. We can go back and get the time and place and provide you with any missing ribbons.

Q. The time on my child's ribbon is not right. What do I do?

A. During the process of timing, transcribing, and inputting data into the computer, there are many places where mistakes can be made. All precautions are taken to try and get accurate times on the ribbons, but sometimes there are errors. Sometimes we can go back to the original timer sheets and find the mistakes. Sometimes, however, these are timer errors that we cannot figure out later. If you think there is an error, write down your child's name, meet, event number and the approximate time you think should have been and give this to the coach or ribbons person. We will look up the race and correct the time if at all possible.

Q. My 5 year old is swimming against kids that have already turned 7. Why?

A. The child's age as of June 1st is what age they are considered to be for the whole season. Kids with summer birthdays may pass this age during the season, but they stay with the age group where they started. Every age group has at least 2 years of kids, so the younger kids in each age group are at a disadvantage. Help them understand that swim team has "off years" for the children. When they are 7 it is much harder to win against 8 year olds than when they are at the top of their age bracket. Reinforce to them that they should work on their personal best times and not worry about their place in the race.

Q. What about good sportsmanship?

A. This is a great place for parents to help. Talk with your children about this issue. I am always so proud of our kids not only when I see great races where we win, but also when I see us lose and shake hands with the other team's swimmer, telling the winner, "good race." Please help make this important to our kids. Also, during the meets, be friendly to the other team's parents and complimentary whenever possible. It creates a positive environment for everyone. Our most fun meets have been with teams that have this same attitude.

Q. What about the Championship Meet? Do I really need/want to do that?

A. I would encourage you to consider swimming the League Championship Meet. This is the big event for the season, the “Superbowl” of summer league. We will swim at the Georgia Tech Aquatic Center, venue of the 1996 Summer Olympics swimming and diving events. It is a pretty neat thrill for our kids to swim in such a great pool and in front of hundreds of spectators.

If your child is on a relay team or has a shot at finishing in the top 20 in an individual event, it can be quite a memorable occasion for them. Medals and ribbons are awarded to top finishers. For our kids, there is nothing like having their name announced over the loudspeaker right before their individual race, in front of hundreds of people. Even if your child is not in contention for a medal or ribbon, it is fun to participate in a meet this large as well as cheer on our team. Often the kids turn out their best performance of the year at this meet, placing higher than anticipated. Also, the experience that kids get from a large competition like this will help them in future years.

The Championship Meet takes place over two days – Friday and Sunday. On Friday, we swim against teams that are in our Division. Younger kids swim in the morning session and older kids swim in the afternoon. Relays are held first thing at these sessions, so if your child is involved in a relay only, they will finish early. On Sunday, the Championship Finals are run with all ages, in the same order as a regular meet. Both days are long and grueling for the parents. I would recommend that you try to avoid bringing babies or toddlers to these meets if at all possible. You both will be miserable. Also talk to people who have gone before (previous survivors) to find out what it is like and what to bring.

ASA publishes the information and results for previous years online at atlantaswimming.com. You might want to check how your child would have finished in previous years before you decide. Keep in mind that your decision to swim your child may be the difference in determining whether three other eager kids get to swim in a relay.