

Swim Meet 101

At USA Swimming, we realize that many journalists have been covering swimming for a number of years. However, for the new reporters among you, we present **Swim Meet 101**, a document that outlines and explains the basics of swimming. From the difference between a short-course and a long-course event to the mechanics of each stroke, *Swim Meet 101* is a very basic reference guide for any journalist or novice swimming fan. It is our hope that this guide will make the sport of swimming more accessible to the non-swimmers among us.

PART I: GLOSSARY OF COMMON TERMS

terms often used before, during and after a swim event

FINA - Federation Internationale de Natation de Amateur, the international governing body of competitive swimming, diving, water polo and synchronized swimming.

Final - the championship final of an event in which the fastest eight swimmers from the morning's preliminaries compete.

IM - slang for individual medley, an event in which the swimmer uses all four competitive strokes in the following order: butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke and freestyle.

Long Course - a pool configured for swimming with a 50 meter long racing course. World records may be set in long and short course competition. The Olympic Games, as well as most major swimming competitions, are conducted long course.

Negative split - a race strategy in the distance freestyle events in which a swimmer covers the second half of the race faster than the first half.

Prelims - short for preliminaries, also called heats. Those races in which swimmers qualify for the championship and consolation finals (and semifinals when used) in the events.

Relay exchange - the exchange between the swimmer in the water and the next swimmer on the relay team. A perfect exchange will simultaneously have the finishing swimmer's hand on the touch pad and the starting swimmer's feet just touching the starting block with the rest of the starting swimmer's body extended over the water.

Roll - to move on the starting blocks prior to the starting signal. A roll is usually caught by the starter and called a false start, but swimmers will often try to guess the starter's cadence and get a good start. Similar to illegal procedure in football.

Shave - prior to a major competition, a swimmer will shave his or her entire body. The removal of the hair provides less resistance between skin and water and heightens a swimmer's sensations in the water.

Short Course - a pool configured in 25-yard or 25-meter lengths. Most high school and collegiate competitions in the U.S. are conducted in short course yards. The rest of the world swims short course meters in the winter season. The fastest times swum in a 25-yard pool may only gain U.S. Open, American or NCAA record status.

Skisuit - a slang term for a swimsuit designed to have minimum drag in the water. While many swimmers use the traditional knitted lycra, the newest suit is woven lycra, called a "paper" suit because of its texture. There are new styles and fabrics continually put out on the market.

Split - a swimmer's intermediate time in a race. Splits are registered every 25 or 50 meters (depending on the pool length and the equipment on hand) and are used to determine if a swimmer is on record pace.

Taper - the resting process in training for swimming competition. During the middle of the swimming season, a swimmer may work out 12,000 to 18,000 meters each day. As a major competition draws near, the swimmer will "taper" off the distances swum each day. A perfectly designed taper will enable the swimmer to compete at his or her peak capability and is one of the most difficult aspects of swim coaching.

Touch - the finish of a race, when the swimmer's hand reaches the touchpad.

Touchpad - the area at the end of each lane in the pool where a swimmer's time is registered and sent electronically to the timing system and the scoreboard.

Trainer - in the U.S.: an athletic trainer; in Europe: a coach.

Turnover - the number of times a swimmer's arms turn over (cycle) in a given distance or time during a race.

Warm down - used by the swimmer to rid the body of excess lactic acid generated during a race.

Warm up - used by the swimmer before the race to get their muscles loose and ready to race.

PART II: THE EVENTS

an explanation of each event in a swim meet

FREESTYLE

In the freestyle, the competitor may swim any stroke he or she wishes. The usual stroke used is front crawl. This stroke is characterized by the alternate overhand motion of the arms and a flutter kick, which can be either a six-beat-per stroke or two-beat-per-stroke cycle rhythm. The slower two-beat kick is used in the distance races, while the faster, six-beat kick is used in the sprint events and at the very end of the distance races. The freestyle is swum in 50m, 100m, 200m, 400m, 800m (men and women) and 1500m (men only) distances at the Olympic Games.

BACKSTROKE

In the backstroke, the swimmer must stay on his or her back, except during the turns. The stroke is an alternating motion of the arms. During the turn, the shoulders may be turned over the vertical to the breast and a single or double arm pull may be used to make the turn. On the turn, there must be a touch of the wall with some part of the swimmer's body. The swimmer must have returned to his or her back upon leaving the wall.

USA Swimming rules used to allow swimmers to stay submerged for as long as he or she wished, but in order to comply with FINA rules, this aspect of the backstroke race has been modified. Swimmers must now break the surface not more than 15 meters after the start and each turn. The Olympic backstroke races are swum in 100m and 200m distances.

BREASTSTROKE

Perhaps one of the most difficult strokes to master, the breaststroke requires simultaneous movements of the arms on the same horizontal plane. The hands are pushed forward from the breast on or under the surface of the water and brought backward in the propulsive stage of the stroke simultaneously. The kick is a simultaneous thrust of the legs called a "frog" or breaststroke kick. No flutter or dolphin kicking is allowed except for a single downward dolphin kick at the start and turns, per FINA's new breaststroke dolphin kick rule enacted in 2005. Swimmers must touch the wall with both hands at the same time before executing their turn. Breaststroke races in the Olympics are the 100m and 200m distances.

BUTTERFLY

The most physically demanding stroke, the butterfly features the simultaneous overhead stroke of the arms combined with the dolphin kick. The dolphin kick features both legs moving up and down together. No flutter kicking is allowed. As in the breaststroke, swimmers must touch the wall with both hands before turning. In all U.S. Swimming and FINA competition, each swimmer's head must surface within 15 meters of the start of the race and at each turn. This rule was passed at the 1998 FINA Congress in Perth, Australia. Butterfly races are swum in 100m and 200m distances at the Olympics.

INDIVIDUAL MEDLEY

The individual medley, commonly referred to as the "IM," features all four competitive strokes in the following order: butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke and freestyle. The IM is swum in 200m and 400m distances at the Olympics.

MEDLEY RELAY

In the medley relay, all four strokes are swum by four different swimmers. No swimmer may swim more than one leg of the relay, which is swum in backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly and freestyle order. Additionally, it is only possible to set a world record in the 100 meter backstroke (the first leg) in this race because the first leg is the only leg that the officials can mark a "true start" for; all other legs begin at different times according to each relay team's speed. The Olympic medley relay is 400 meters -- or 4x100 meters.

FREESTYLE RELAYS

There are two freestyle relays in Olympic distance, the 400 and 800 meter. In the freestyle relays, four swimmers each swim one fourth of the total distance. As in the medley relay, no individual may swim more than one leg of the relay.

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PART III: NATIONALS QUICK FACTS

details about the event and the international meet selections

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

The ConocoPhillips USA Swimming National Championships is the major championships for USA Swimming. The best swimmers in the country, determined by strict time standards, qualify

for the event. Nationals attract a lot of attention, garnering television and media coverage, an internet broadcast and thousands of fans. Nationals often serve as a qualifying meet for such other events as the World Championships, World University Games, Pan American Games or Pan Pacific Championships. The ConocoPhillips National Championships generally run for five days. Past venues have included Minneapolis, Minn., East Meadow, N.Y., Nashville, Tenn., Indianapolis, Ind., and Fresno, Calif.

In Olympic years, the Nationals are replaced by the Olympic Trials. Swimmers will spend years training for this event, even taking time off of school to train full-time. Only the top two swimmers in each event at the Trials will represent the United States in the Olympics, so for many swimmers the Olympic Trials is a do-or-die situation. Swimmers cannot be nominated or elected to the Olympic Team - their status as Olympians is determined solely by their performance at Olympic Trials. This event has been televised by NBC Sports, and tickets sell out months prior to the event. Historically, this has been the most well-attended swimming meet in the United States.

THIS YEAR'S MEET SELECTIONS: FIVE PRESTIGIOUS INTERNATIONAL TEAMS

This year's Nationals serves as the selection meet for five international teams. This means that the top swimmers at this year's Nationals will not only be National Champions, but will represent the U.S. on an international level by being assigned to a team set to compete at one of the following events:



2006 Mutual of Omaha Pan Pacific Championships

A long course swimming event first held in 1985, the meeting was initially staged biennially, but became quadrennial event starting in 2002. Participating nations include: Canada, the United States, Australia and Japan, in addition to several other non-European countries including China, New Zealand and Brazil. This year marks the 10th Pan Pacs Championships, which will be **Aug. 17-21** in **Victoria, British Columbia**, with pool swim dates on Aug. 17-20.

A total of exactly 26 men and 26 women will be selected for the Pan Pacs team using the below criteria. (The FINA World Championship, Pan American and Mutual of Omaha Dual in the Pool Teams will be selected from this team.)

Priority #1: The top four finishers in the finals of the 100m and 200m freestyle and the winner of each individual event.

Priority #2: The second-place finisher in each individual event.

Priority #3: The fifth-place finisher in the 100 and 200 free.

Priority #4: The sixth-place finisher in the 100 and 200 free.

Note: If the above priorities result in a list of more than 26 men or 26 women, integrated international rankings will be used for the selection. If all four priorities are used and the result is fewer than 26 men or 26 women, no additional swimmers will be added.

2007 FINA Swimming World Championships

The 2007 FINA World Championships comprise five aquatic events: pool swimming, open water swimming, synchronized swimming, diving and water polo. The pool swimming facet of the competition will include various events using all four strokes (Freestyle, Butterfly, Breaststroke and Backstroke) for men and women ranging in distance from 50m up to 1500m. A total of 42 gold medals will be available for Championships.

The swimming schedule will take place over eight days during the second week of the Championships, which run **March 17 through April 1, 2007**, in **Melbourne, Australia**, with pool swim dates March 25-April 1.

This team will be selected from the Mutual of Omaha Pan Pacific Championship Team using the criteria listed above.

2007 Pan American Games

The Pan American Games are a multi-sport event held every four years between competitors from all nations of the Americas. The inaugural Pan Ams were held in Argentina in 1951 after the creation of the Pan American Sports Organization.

At the 2003 Pan Ams, more than 5,000 athletes from 42 Pan American countries competed for gold, silver and bronze medals in 36 sporting events. The next Pan Ams will be **July 13-29, 2007**, in **Rio de Janeiro, Brazil**, with pool swim dates July 16-24.

This team will be selected from the Mutual of Omaha Pan Pacific Championship Team using the criteria listed above.

2007 World University Games

The World University Games is also known as The Universiade - an international multi-sport event organized for university athletes by the International University Sports Federation (FISU). The name is a combination of the words "University" and "Olympiad." The Universiade has been held every year since 1959.

The 2007 WUGs team will compete **Aug. 8-18, 2007**, in **Bangkok, Thailand**, with pool swim dates Aug. 8-13. Competitors at the World University Games must be 23 years of age or younger on the day of the WUG opening ceremonies and enrolled as a full-time college student or accepted for full time enrollment in the fall. Swimmers who qualify for the World Champs team are not eligible to compete at WUGs.

A maximum of 26 men and 26 women will be selected using the following criteria:

Priority #1: The four fastest available swimmers based on finish order in the finals of the 100m and 200m freestyle and the first available swimmer based on finish order in each individual event.

Priority #2: The second fastest available swimmer based on finish order in the finals of each individual event.

Note: If the above priorities result in a list of more than 26 men or 26 women, integrated international rankings will be used for the selection. If all four priorities are used and the result is fewer than 26 men or 26 women, no additional swimmers will be added.

2007 Mutual of Omaha Duel in the Pool

The Mutual of Omaha Duel in the Pool pits the top two swimming nations against each other, featuring one of the most intense rivalries in international sport. Each team's roster will be the same as its 2007 World Championships team. The meet will consist of combined scoring for one overall team winner. Athletes can enter up to four events each, including relay swims. Each team can enter up to three athletes in each individual event and one relay team in the relay events.

The next Duel in the Pool will be **April 3, 2007**, in **Sydney, Australia**.

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PART IV: THIS TIME LAST QUADRENNIAL

how the 2002 Nationals set the stage for the 2004 Olympic Games

This year - 2006 - marks the second year in USA Swimming's four-year cycle of events, which begins after each Summer Olympic Games and ends with the next Olympics. (For example, the 2004-2008 quadrennial began after the 2004 Summer Olympics and will end with the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing.) Usually, the Nationals that take place during the second year mark one of the biggest domestic meets of the cycle, second only to the Olympic Team Trials that are held just before the Olympics.

The 2002 Phillips 66 National Championships is the comparable meet for this year's Nationals because it set the stage for 2004 Olympic Team Trials - Swimming and, subsequently, the 2004 Olympic Games. Here's a look at what went down at the 2002 Nationals - and the ramifications at the 2004 Olympics.

AT THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS IN 2002 ...

The 2002 Nationals was **Michael Phelps'** breakout meet, as the 17-year-old won four events: 100m and 200m butterfly, 200m and 400m individual medley. He set a world record in the 400m IM and American records in the 100m fly and 200m IM. It was an impressive performance for Phelps, who before that had been known primarily as a 200m butterfly. However, Phelps displayed his versatility ... and ability for special performances in the future.



Natalie Coughlin officially became a part of swimming trivia, becoming the first woman to swim the 100m backstroke in under a minute. She was also the first person since Tracy Caulkins in 1978 to win five U.S. National titles at one meet when she won the 100m and 200m freestyle, 100m (world record) and 200m (American record) backstroke and

100m butterfly.

The 19-year-old **Aaron Peirsol** won both the 100m and 200m back, signaling a "changing of the guard" in the backstroke races. Peirsol defeated three-time Olympic gold medalist Lenny Krayzelburg, who was the star of the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney and the king of the backstrokes before Peirsol. It was the first head-to-head meeting for the two after Peirsol took down Krayzelburg's previous world mark in the 200m back five months earlier.

Kaitlin Sandeno suffered a career threatening back injury (stress fracture) in 2001 that took six months to diagnose. However, she continued to swim, but it wasn't until the 2003 Spring Nationals that she returned to top form. In 2002, she was sixth in the 200m fly.

Ian Crocker finished second in the 100m fly to friend and rival Phelps. However, the finish did not go unnoticed to Crocker. It proved to be all the motivation the University of Texas star needed. He would come back with vengeance in 2003 at the World Championships in Barcelona, stunning the world by upsetting Phelps in the 100m fly in world record time.



AT THE 2004 OLYMPIC GAMES ...

You can't talk about the 2004 Olympic Games without mentioning **Phelps** in the same breath. The Baltimore, Md., native dominated the Olympic pool in Athens, taking home eight medals, six of them gold. He was the first swimmer in a non-boycotted Olympic Games to accomplish the feat. And the four events he won individual gold? The very same ones he won in Fort Lauderdale.

Coughlin left Athens with five medals (two gold) and three records (one world record) - good enough to merit the distinction 'greatest Olympic performance ever by an American female swimmer.' She became just the third American woman to win five Olympic medals at one meet.



A two-time Olympian, **Peirsol** was a triple gold medalist at the 2004 Games, becoming just the fifth male (fourth American) to sweep the backstroke races. He also swam on the world record-setting 4x100m medley relay, setting his own individual world record in the lead-off 100m backstroke leg.

Sandeno brought home a medal of every color from Athens. Her first gold came as the anchor of the 4x200m free relay that captured gold and broke the 17-year-old world record. Sandeno also won silver in the 400m IM in American record time, bronze in the 400m free and narrowly missed a medal in the 200m fly (she took fourth).

In one of the most memorable races of the Olympic Games, **Crocker** and Phelps added another chapter to their rivalry in the 100m butterfly, as Phelps outouched Crocker at the wall to win the race by a mere four-hundredths. In the ultimate display of sportsmanship, Phelps gave his relay spot in the 4x100m medley relay to Crocker. The Portland, Maine, native did not disappoint, swimming the fastest butterfly split in history to help the U.S. set a world record and win the gold.

Relays: The Americans pulled together as a team, winning three of the six relays - all in dramatic fashion. The men's 4x200m freestyle relay pulled off one of the biggest upsets in Olympic swimming, stunning the Australians, who had not lost the race at a major international competition in seven years. The women's 4x200m freestyle relay came to the blocks the next day inspired, going on to win gold and shatter the oldest world record in the books, set by the East Germans 17 years ago to the day. On the final night of swimming in Athens - last event of the meet - the men's 4x100m medley relay set a world record, continuing the U.S. streak of never losing the men's 400m medley relay in an Olympic Games.

