

## Basic information and a few common technical rules

There are five competitive swimming strokes and these are namely Freestyle, Backstroke, Breaststroke, Butterfly, and Individual Medley.

In competitions each swim meet offers a variety of events and distances, depending on the age group of the swimmers and their classifications. Each swimmer will have a limit to the number of events he or she may swim each day depending on the meet rules.

In **FREESTYLE** events, the competitor may swim any stroke. The stroke most commonly used is sometimes called the front crawl, which is characterized by the alternate stroking of the arms over the water surface and an alternating (up-and-down) flutter kick by the legs. During each turn and at the finish, some part of the swimmer must touch the wall. Most competent swimmers complete a tumble turn for this stroke but others may do a touch and turn. Rules for this stroke include, but are not limited to walking on the bottom of the pool, pulling on the lane rope, not touching the wall on a turn or finish and not completing the entire distance.

The **BACKSTROKE** as the name implies takes place on the back. The stroke consists of an alternating motion of the arms with a flutter kick of the legs. During turns, swimmers may rotate to the stomach and perform a tumble turn and some part of the swimmer must touch the wall. The swimmer must finish on their back. Rules for this stroke include, but are not limited to pulling or kicking into the wall once the swimmer has turned passed the vertical onto their breast for their turn. Turning onto the breast before touching the wall with the hand at the end of the race. (i.e. finishing on their front)

The **BREASTSTROKE** is the oldest stroke and dates back hundreds of years. It requires simultaneous movement of the arms on the same horizontal plane. The hands are pressed out in front of the breast in a heart shaped pattern and recovered under or on the surface of the water. The kick is a simultaneous somewhat circular motion similar to the action of frogs' legs. On turns and at the finish, the swimmer must touch the wall with both hands simultaneously either above or below the surface of the water. Rules for this stroke include, but are not limited to an illegal kick such as a flutter (freestyle) dolphin (butterfly) or scissor (side stroke) At the start of the race and after each turn only one pull and one kick (in that order) under the water is allowed (A single fly kick is also allowed at the start and after each turn under the water, but this has to be timed to perfection and the best rule to follow is "if you have not been taught this then don't risk it"). Other common reasons for Breaststroke disqualifications include not being on the breast, alternating movement of the arms, taking two arm strokes or

two leg kicks while the head is under water; touching with only one hand on the turn or finish. \*\* If a swimmer interferes with goggles which have slipped this will result in a disqualification if spotted by the judges, as arms cease to be simultaneous.

Some consider the **BUTTERFLY** to be the most beautiful of the strokes. It features a simultaneous recovery of the arms over the water combined with an undulating dolphin kick. In the kick, the swimmer must keep both legs together and may not use a flutter, scissors or breaststroke kick. Both hands must touch the wall simultaneously on the turns and the finish. The butterfly is the newest stroke and was developed in the early 1950s as a variation of the breaststroke. It became an Olympic stroke during the 1956 Melbourne games. Rules for this stroke include, but are not limited to alternating movements of the arms or legs, pushing the arms forward under instead of over the water surface (underwater recovery); a breaststroke style of kick; touching with only one hand at the turns or finish

The **INDIVIDUAL MEDLEY** is commonly referred to as the **I.M.** It features all four main strokes in a single race. In the IM, the swimmer begins with the butterfly, then follows after one-fourth of the race to the backstroke, followed by the breaststroke and finally freestyle. Tumble turns are not used in this event. The same rules apply to each of the strokes as are shown above.

The **MEDLEY RELAY** event similarly to the IM features all four strokes however the order of the strokes differs in order to the IM. In the **medley relay** the first swimmer swims backstroke, the second breaststroke, the third butterfly, and the final swimmer anchors the relay with freestyle. The same rules apply to each of the strokes as are shown above. \*\* Note that in some galas and leagues the event for the 9 yr old swimmers is often ordered as Backstroke, Breaststroke, freestyle, freestyle. And the butterfly stroke is not included.

At the **START** of a race the swimmer is called to the starting position by 3 whistles, the starter calls "take your mark", and visually checks that all swimmers are completely motionless. When all swimmers are set, the starting horn is sounded to start the race. If the starter feels that one of the swimmers has moved, left early or gained an unfair advantage, the guilty swimmer will be disqualified after the race. For a false start (falling or toppling into the water accidentally) under ASA rules and those of the world governing bodies, one false start disqualifies the swimmer and in many cases the swimmer may not be allowed to swim. The message here is NEVER move even a hair before the race starts.

The **COURSE**, Competition pools may be short course (25 meters), or long course (50 meters). The international standard (as used in the Olympics) is 50 meters. World records are recognised as being set in 50 meter pools.

The **TECHNICAL RULES** of swimming are designed to provide fair and equitable conditions of competition and to promote uniformity in the sport. Each swimming stroke has specific rules designed to ensure that no swimmer gets an unfair competitive advantage over another swimmer. Officials are trained to observe the swimmers during each event and to ensure compliance with these technical rules. If a swimmer commits an infringement of the rules that is observed by an official, a disqualification (DQ) will result. This means that the swimmer will not receive an official time and will not be eligible for an award in that event. A disqualification can also result from actions such as not getting to the starting blocks on time, (This is why we ask all swimmers to stay with their team members and not disappear into the showers or to parents at Gala's) false starting, and performing strokes in an illegal manner. Swimmers may also be disqualified for unsportsmanlike conduct; However DQs are usually the result of technical rule violations. There is a technical rule book which is translated into a number of languages and updated on a regular basis. Violations of the rules are reported to the Referee.

**DISQUALIFICATIONS** -The rules require that every reasonable effort be made to notify the swimmer or his coach of the reason for the disqualification. If your child is disqualified in an event, be supportive rather than critical. For younger or new gala swimmers a disqualification should be treated as a learning experience, not as a punishment. A disqualification alerts the swimmer and coach to what portions of the swimmer's stroke need to be corrected. They should be considered in the same light as an incorrect answer in schoolwork-they point out areas that need further practice. Disqualifications are necessary to keep the competition fair and equitable for all competitors. Remember that judge's decisions are impartial and final so please respect their decision. A supportive attitude on the part of the official, coach, and parent can make a positive situation out of the disqualification. In the majority of cases swimmers learn from their mistakes after getting over initial disappointment at being disqualified.