

Swim Team 101

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Introduction

Every swimmer's parent has experienced that first day of swim practice or that first swim meet where they wonder, why am I here and what's going on? We've all been there before and will be glad to enlighten you in your quest to understand the world of summer swimming.

Although this information is written for use by parents of new Virginia Hills Tidal Wave swimmers, the fundamentals are true for any area swim team. It will (hopefully) provide some information that will help you understand what is happening while your child swims. Please remember that the only stupid question is the one that is unasked. Your Team Reps, Coaches and fellow swim parents all want you to understand and enjoy our summer swim program.

Welcome to the Tidal Wave -- we're glad to have you with us!

Chapter 1: About The Swim Team

Our Philosophy

We believe in establishing a healthy environment that encourages swimmers to do their best, recognizes their contributions, and is fun for the entire family. Our goal is that kids will enjoy the time spent developing their swimming skills and belonging to the team. Most of the kids don't care if we're in a top division or a bottom division. We'd all like to be division champions, which usually means going undefeated, but only one team out of six can usually claim this honor. Personal development is what is most important and for a swimmer that means improving your times.

We've all taken our kids to soccer or other sports and probably stood by as two or three parents ran the team. Swimming isn't like that. You can't run a swim program without parental help. In fact, it takes over 40 parents to time, officiate and score a typical swim meet, and that doesn't include pool set up and tear down or running the snack bar or non-swimming team activities. Coaches are the only paid staff for swim team -- everyone else is a volunteer. We value each other's contributions!

Swimming is unique in that there's a place on the team for anyone eighteen or younger who can swim across the pool without assistance. How many other sports have kids five years old to eighteen years old and their parents on the same team participating in the same competition?

Expectations for Swimmers

Although swimming is considered an individual sport, our summer league is structured with an emphasis on the team. Any team is only as good as the people on it. In keeping with our philosophy articulated above, our expectations are simple:

1. The Virginia Hills Swim Team is not a swim lesson program. A swimmer must be able to swim a length of the pool to join the team. We don't care how fast or how ugly or how legal the stroke is or how long it takes to swim that length. We'll help your swimmer become a better swimmer, but in fairness to the other swimmers on the team, we must insist that all swimmers be able to swim. Your child will feel better about his/her being on the team if he/she is competitive with most of the other kids of the same age.
2. Keep your commitments: We're planning on you to swim at all the meets unless you tell us you're not available, preferably at least three days in advance.
3. Pay attention to the coaches: With many swimmers, disruptions aren't fair to the other swimmers.
4. Do your best- it's a lot more important than being the best.
5. Have fun.

Expectations for Parents

1. Pay attention to information from the team rep (usually via e-mail). There will be messages before meets with information about location and report time, swimmer selections (what stroke your swimmer will be doing), and volunteer assignments. Sign up with multiple e-mail addresses if you'd like!
2. Let the team rep know in advance when you are unavailable.
3. Keep your volunteer commitment (we need parents to run the meets).
4. When volunteering on the deck (as a timer, for example) wear a plain white top (no writing or logos) and dark bottoms.
5. Ask questions, of the team rep and other parents who are veteran swim team families. There is a lot to learn, we're all volunteers, and we want to make this as easy as possible!

Chapter 2: Important Basic Stuff

Practices

Practice times are posted on the Swim Team Bulletin Board and in the summer swim season section of our web site. Swimmers should come to practice regularly and be prepared to do their best. It's important to attend morning practice sessions if at all possible. Afternoon sessions compete with club members' use of the pool, are crowded, and are not offered each day. Please work with your friends and neighbors to arrange car pools to help swimmers attend morning practice.

Swimmer Apparel

Swimmers should wear a swimsuit that will be comfortable for racing. The Tidal Wave, like every other swim team, has a team suit. The wearing of the team suit is optional. There is a culture shock for some boys to the coverage of jammers. Usually, when they realize that this type of suit is good for racing and everyone else is wearing one, their opposition breaks down. Although a team suit is not required, suits or caps with any logo other than Tidal Wave are not permitted (wearing a plain suit/cap is fine). Caps are not required, but recommended. Team caps can be purchased from the team rep. Most swimmers use goggles.

Accessories for the well-dressed swimmer

Every swimmer needs a towel, the bigger and thicker the better. Other accessories you should consider are goggles, a sweat suit (for cool days), a swim cap (especially for girls with long hair), a hat or other sun protection, flip-flops or some other sort of footwear, and a bag to carry everything. You should also have liquid refreshment (Gatorade, All Sport, or a water bottle) and a light snack for during the meet such as fruit, granola bars or other healthy foods. Save the sweets at the concession stand as a reward for swimming a great swim.

Buddy Program

Being a new kid on the swim team can be a bewildering experience. We've instituted a program to give every swimmer a Buddy to cheer them on at swim meets and help them adjust to their new experience.

Chapter 3: Organizational Stuff

Let's cover a few organizational items, just to make sure we're in sync.

Team Reps and Coaches

The people you'll run into the most in your swim team dealings are the Team Reps and the Coaches. The Team Reps are volunteer parents who were new to swimming at one time just like you are today. The Team Reps are responsible for running every aspect of the swim team and are the representatives of the Virginia Hills team to other swim teams and the NVSL. It's a job that is impossible to do successfully without help from a great many parents. The Team Reps hire the Coaches who are responsible to the team reps for the swimming portion of the swim team program.

Northern Virginia Swimming League (NVSL)

In 1956, 8 Northern Virginia Pools founded the Northern Virginia Swim League. Today, the NVSL has over 10,000 swimmers on 104 teams and is the largest summer swim league in the United States. Obviously, with this many teams, there has to be some division of teams. During the off season, the NVSL ranks each team from 1 to 104 based primarily on swimmers times, and then divides the teams, based on these rankings, into about 18 Divisions of five or six teams. This means that the fastest teams are in the lower numbered Divisions and the less competitive teams are in the higher numbered Divisions. The other teams in our division, and meet locations, are on the NVSL's Web site, <http://www.nvsl.org>. Directions to pools are provided prior to the meet.

Dual Meets

The six teams in each division swim the other five teams, one at a time on five consecutive Saturdays, in a series of Dual Meets ("A" Meets), so called because there are two teams competing. Based upon the results of these five meets, a division champion will be named.

Relay Carnivals

Another NVSL event is the Division Relay Carnival, which takes place on the Wednesday between the third and fourth weeks of the season. All six teams in each division converge on one pool for an evening of relay races. These include both Freestyle relays (each swimmer swims the Freestyle) and Medley relays (each swimmer swims a different stroke). The next night, all the Division Coordinators meet and relay teams are selected to swim at the All-Star Relay Carnival the following week. The sole criterion for selection to the All-Star Relay Carnival is to have one of the eighteen fastest times in events swum in the Division Relay Carnivals.

Divisionals

The sixth week, each Division has an Individual Championship meet, commonly referred to as "Divisionals." Each team is allowed to enter two swimmers in each event and a swimmer can enter no more than two events. If a team does not have two swimmers for an event, the other teams can bid in other swimmers to fill the empty lanes. This is an individual meet and is not scored.

All Stars

After the Divisionals, all the Division coordinators meet to select swimmers for the All-Stars meet the following week. The sole criterion for selection to All-Stars is to have one of the eighteen fastest times swum that day in an event in the Divisional meet. All Stars can be overwhelming for a first time swimmer as approximately 600 swimmers plus parents, coaches, and officials converge on a pool for a meet that takes about six hours. If your swimmer is fast enough to be named an All Star, it is an thrill they will never forget.



Chapter 4: My Kid Says He's Supposed to Swim Like a Butterfly

If you're not a former swimmer, the strokes and their rules can be a cause of bewilderment. While the stroke rules are simple enough for a six year old to understand, most people do not have a copy of the US Swimming Rules, so we'll briefly describe the strokes below. The rules below are the US Swimming rules as modified for use in the NVSL. Teams in other leagues may have slightly different rules.

Freestyle

The freestyle is defined as any means of swimming across the pool. Any stroke and kick are acceptable. There are, however, a few don'ts associated with this stroke, specifically: (1) You cannot walk on the bottom or pull yourself along using the lane lines and (2) In a 50 Meter race (two pool lengths) you must touch the wall at the 25 meter end before touching the wall at the 50 meter end (This may seem obvious, but sometimes swimmers miss the wall at the turning end of the pool)

Backstroke

Like the freestyle, almost anything goes on the backstroke as long as you stay on your back. Watching swimmers learn the backstroke is a perverse sense of fun as they bounce off lane lines and wonder where they are. Eventually, they will learn to guide off the lane lines, use the overhead backstroke flags and the lane line markings to know where they're at in the pool, and count strokes from the flags to the wall.

Backstroke starts are different from all others because the swimmer is in the water feet planted against the wall, and hanging on to either another swimmer's legs or the lip on the pool awaiting the starter's signal. "Legs" must be grabbed below the knee. Persons serving in an official capacity (such as timers or coaches) may not serve as legs. If your swimmer backstrokes, he or she will eventually learn the backstroke flip turn. This is the one exception to staying on your back and can be used only as part of a turn (not a finish) at the pool wall.

Breaststroke

The Breaststroke has two components, the kick and the arm pull. The pull and its recovery must both be under the breast and cannot extend further back than the waist area. The kick is a "frog" kick and the toes must be pointed outward during the propulsive part of the kick. The arm pull and kick must be in an alternating sequence and the elbows must stay below the water except for tagging the wall at the finish. Breaststroke turns and finishes require a simultaneous two-hand touch.

Butterfly

A well-executed butterfly (or Fly) is the most beautiful exhibition of power you'll ever see in a swimming pool. Quite frankly, the fly is the hardest stroke for most swimmers to

perfect and while they are learning it many look like they are drowning. There are two components of the fly; the arm pull and the kick. The arm pull must be an over the water recovery (the arm over the surface of the water from elbow to wrist) with the arms moving simultaneously. The kick is a dolphin kick with both legs moving simultaneously. Unlike the Breaststroke, there is no requirement to alternate the kick and pull. Turns and finishes require a simultaneous two-hand touch at the wall.

Individual Medley

The individual medley (or IM) is when an individual swims each of the four strokes in the sequence Butterfly, Backstroke, Breaststroke, Freestyle. We swim a 100 Meter IM, which means that 25 Meters, or one pool length, of each stroke is swum. In a 100 Meter IM, every turn is a stroke change and stroke finish rules apply. This means no Backstroke Flip Turns.

Relays

There are two kinds of Relays, the freestyle relay and the medley relay. Both involve a team of four swimmers, each swimming one quarter of the total distance. In the freestyle relay, each swimmer swims the freestyle. In the medley relay, the sequence is Backstroke, Breaststroke, Butterfly and Freestyle. At the NVSL Relay Carnival, swimmers eight and under swim a modified medley relay where the fly leg of the relay is replaced with a freestyle leg.

In all relays, each swimmer must wait until the previous swimmer touches the wall prior to leaving the deck. Running starts or pushes from teammates are not allowed.

Chapter 5: Swim Meets

There are two basic meets you will encounter as a parent: Saturday meets, which are scored/competitive dual meets and Monday Meets, which are un-scored/developmental dual meets.

Saturday Meets

Saturday Meets consist of 38 Individual events and 12 Relays. The events swum for each stroke and age group are shown below. Remember, each pool length is 25 meters.

Saturday Meet Events and Distances

Age group	Freestyle	Backstroke	Breaststroke	Butterfly	Freestyle Relay	Medley Relay
8 & Under Boys	25 M	25 M	25 M		100 M	
8 & Under Girls	25 M	25 M	25 M		100 M	
9-10 Boys	50 M	50 M	50 M	25 M		100 M
9-10 Girls	50 M	50 M	50 M	25 M		100 M
11-12 Boys	50 M	50 M	50 M	50 M		100 M
11-12 Girls	50 M	50 M	50 M	50 M		100 M
13-14 Boys	50 M	50 M	50 M	50 M		200 M
13-14 Girls	50 M	50 M	50 M	50 M		200 M
15-18 Boys	50 M	50 M	50 M	50 M		200 M
15-18 Girls	50 M	50 M	50 M	50 M		200 M
Mixed Age Boys					200 M	
Mixed Age Girls					200 M	

NOTES:

1. In Saturday dual meets, the youngest age category for the Butterfly is 10 and under. There is a 25 Meter Butterfly for 8 & under swimmers at Divisionals and All Stars.
2. The order of events is to go down each column starting on the left side except that the mixed age relays are the last two events. To make it easier, buy a meet sheet.
3. The Mixed Age Relays are swum by, in order, an 11-12 year old, a 9-10 year old, a 13-14 year old, and a 15-18 year old.

Who Swims?

These meets are to see who can score the most points, so the fastest swimmers get to swim. Three swimmers can be entered in each individual event and no swimmer can swim more than two individual events. Since swimmers take vacations and go places such as scout camp, and a swimmer can swim in only two events (plus relays) in any meet, you don't have to be one of the three fastest swimmers to swim in a Saturday meet. Who swims an event may seem to be a mystery. However, after the first meet both teams know the others swimmers times and we try to position our swimmers to optimize our points and win.

Disqualifications (DQs) and False Starts

A swimmer will be disqualified (or DQd) if he/she does not follow the rules of the stroke or false starts. These are covered in more detail in Chapter 7.

Seeding

In Saturday meets, the home team has lanes 1, 3, and 5 while the visiting team has lanes 2, 4, and 6. The fastest swimmers swim in lanes 3 and 4, the next fastest in lanes 1 and 2, and the next fastest in lanes 5 and 6. Swimmers are seeded based upon their fastest times attained in prior competition. Lane 1 is always on the right side as you stand facing the pool at the starting end.

Meet Sheets

While all NVSL meets have an announcer, the best way to follow the meet is with a meet sheet, which lists all the events, swimmers, and seed times. Meet Sheets are usually found in the concession area and typically sell for a dollar or two.

Scoring

In the individual events, a first place finish earns 5 points for the team, a second place 3 points and a third place finish 1 point. Relays are scored as 5 points for the winner and 0 points for the loser. There are 402 points up for grabs in a Saturday meet. Unless there are one or more places not awarded in an event due to DQs or lack of swimmers, you need 202 points to win.

In the event of a tie, the points for the places involved are equally split among the swimmers. For example, a two-way tie for second place, each swimmer earns 2 points (3 points for second plus 1 point for third equals 4 points, half for each swimmer). No third place would be awarded because the next swimmer is fourth. For a third place tie, each swimmer is awarded 1/2 point.

Relay Carnivals

In Relay Carnivals, teams are not seeded. Each team's lane assignment for the first event is based upon luck of the draw and the teams then rotate one lane to the left after each event. The meet sheet lists only the team swimming in each lane in each event (except for All Star Relay Carnival).

Monday Night Developmental Meets B Meets

These meets are designed for all swimmers to improve their strokes and times. Although some swimmers are not yet ready for A meets, **everyone** can swim the B meets.

A swimmer who has placed 1st, 2nd or 3rd in an A meet can no longer swim that stroke in the developmental meets (unless in an unofficial capacity).

Ribbons

Ribbons are awarded for 1st through 6th Place finishes in all meets.



Chapter 6: Who Are All These People Dressed in White?

Your first swim meet can be a bewildering experience as you encounter a vast horde of adults dressed in white tops. NVSL rules require white as the color to be worn by all officials. This is also practical as white is a good color to wear on a hot humid summer morning.

Clerk of the Course

The Clerk of the Course is the "gatekeeper" for all swimmers in our meets. The people who perform this function get the swimmers to the right lanes for the correct race. You can't run a race without swimmers and the clerk of the course makes sure the right swimmer gets to the right place at the right time.

Referee

The Referee is the chief official for each swim meet. He is responsible for the conduct of the meets and is the final authority on the interpretation and enforcement of all swimming rules. Prior to the start of each race, the referee sounds two or three short blasts to advise the participants to get ready. After the announcer or starter announces the event, the Referee sounds one long blast as a signal for swimmers to get into position for the start or to jump feet first into the water for a backstroke event. For Backstroke events, a second long blast is given to bring the swimmers to the wall for the start. When the referee sees that all the swimmers are ready, he extends his arm pointing towards the starter. At this point, the starter takes control.

Starter

The Starter is responsible for insuring that all swimmers are given a fair and equitable start. The starter will instruct the swimmers to "Take your mark". After all swimmers are ready and still, the starter will start the race, using a "Colorado System" (so called because it is built by Colorado Timing Systems). This system consists of a public address system, a horn, and a strobe light.

A race can be recalled only if it was a bad start by the starter (i.e. not all the swimmers were ready) or for a safety reason. This is done using a recall signal on the Colorado system (you'll know it when you hear it). For more information, see False Starts in Chapter 7.

Stroke and Turn Judges

Once the race has started, the Stroke & Turn Judges are responsible for insuring that all swimmers obey all the rules for the stroke that they are swimming. These people are always at the ends of the pool for starts and finishes and walk the sides of the pool as best they can within the physical constraints of the pool. If a Stroke and Turn Judge sees a violation of the rules, he raises his hand to signify that an infraction has occurred. A

Disqualification is recorded on a DQ slip, which the referee reviews and approves and forwards copies to the Table workers and the Team Rep.

Marshals are responsible for ensuring that Warm-ups are conducted safely and that order is maintained during the warm-ups. Duties include ensuring that diving starts are used in warm-ups only when a lane is one way away from the starting end, stopping any horse play and making sure swimmers aren't hanging or sitting on the lane lines.

Relay Take-off Judges

During relays, you'll see four Relay Take-off Judges at each end of the pool (two per lane). Their job is to ensure that each swimmer touches the wall prior to the next swimmer in the relay leaving the deck. Each Judge notes on a slip of paper whether each swimmer in his lane left before or after the swimmer in the water touched the wall. Relay Take-off Judges do not raise their hands when they observe an early take-off because a disqualification occurs only if both Relay Take-off Judges observed an early takeoff.

Timers

The timers are the most important people to every swimmer. They are the people who determine each swimmer's official time for each race. Being a timer is a good entry-level position for new parents to help out in. Some parents have been timers for years and wouldn't want to see a swim meet from any other viewpoint. If you can start and stop a stopwatch, you can be a timer. We'll even provide the stopwatch. Timers start their watches on the strobe light from the Colorado system and stop their watches when the swimmer touches the wall. There are three timers per lane and all three times are recorded. The middle time is the official time. The Chief Timer collects the time cards from the timers, reviews them for accuracy and completeness, and forwards them on to the table workers.

Table Workers

The time cards from the timers and any DQ slips go to the Table Workers who determine the order of finish for each event, score the meet, and prepare ribbons for the participants. Several people from each team perform these functions to insure that errors are caught before the results are announced.

Team Rep

The Team Rep is the designated recipient of all DQ slips for his team and is the only person with any official standing to challenge any decisions made by the referee. It sounds like an easy job, but remember, most of the Team Rep's job is done before the meet starts.

Coaches

During the meet, the Coaches primary responsibility is to encourage and praise the swimmers and to make sure that they get to the Clerk of the Course in time to swim.

Other Very Important People

It would be impossible to host a swim meet without a number of people in Other Very Important Positions. These people run telephone trees, edit newsletters, set up the pool and sell concessions. They also announce the results, run social activities, act as Marshals in the team area and do other jobs that need to be done. **We need the help of every family in order to have a successful swim season.**



Chapter 7: What Do You Mean, My Kid DQ'd?

In swimming, the rules must be followed in total or a disqualification, or DQ, is committed. This can be traumatic the first time a swimmer is DQ'd for just one mistake, but it isn't fair to other swimmers who swim the entire race per the rules to do otherwise.

What is a DQ?

A DQ (short for disqualification) is any violation of the rules observed by any appropriate official. Some of the more common reasons for DQing are as follows.

Freestyle:

- Failure to touch the wall at the turning end of the pool
- Walking on the bottom or pulling on the lane lines
- Exiting the pool before swimming the specified distance

Backstroke:

- Past vertical towards the breast at any time except during a flip turn
- Leaving the wall after a turn past vertical towards the breast
- Improper flip turn (older swimmers)

Breaststroke:

- Incorrect kick, such as a Scissors kick or Flutter kick
- Non-Simultaneous two-hand touch or one hand touch at turn or finish
- Toes not pointed outward during the propulsive part of the kick
- More than one stroke underwater with arms fully extended at start or turn
- Arm recovery past waist except on first stroke after start or turn
- Head didn't break surface by widest part of second arm pull underwater after a start or turn

Butterfly:

- Non-Simultaneous or one handed wall touch at the turn or finish
- Non-Simultaneous leg movement during kicks
- Arms (from elbow to wrist) don't clear water surface during recovery
- Non-Simultaneous arm movement during recovery

Relay Races:

- A swimmer leaves the deck before the previous swimmer touches the wall or deck

False Start:

- A swimmer starts the race early (more details below)

How will I know a DQ occurred?

Unlike football, we don't blow a whistle and announce to the world that a rules violation occurred. When a Stroke and Turn Judge observes a violation, he raises his hand to signify that he has observed a violation then writes it up on a DQ slip. The judge then takes the slip to the referee, who verifies that rule has been broken and can question the stroke and turn judge to ensure that he was able to see the violation that was cited. The referee then gives one copy of the DQ slip to the Team Rep and another copy to the Table Workers. Another clue that a DQ has occurred is a Stroke and Turn Judge writing and a longer than normal pause between events.

Disqualifications for early relay takeoffs are done slightly differently. The referee receives all the take-off slips from all the judges. If both judges on a lane agree that an early takeoff occurred, the Referee will write the DQ slip to be distributed.

False Starts

A false start occurs whenever a swimmer moves towards the pool after having assumed a still position (taking his/her mark) and before the Starter has started the race. When this occurs, a swimmer is usually trying to anticipate the starting signal and beat the other swimmers into the water.

If the false start is detected before the starting signal is sounded, the offending swimmer can be removed from the race prior to it starting. If a false start occurs but the starting signal has sounded, the race will not be stopped. Instead the false starting swimmer(s) will be notified of their false start at the conclusion of the race. The use of a recall signal is now limited to a bad start (i.e. not all swimmers were ready) or for a safety reason. If the starter sounds the recall signal, no swimmer can be removed for a false start.

How do I know if My Kid DQ'd

Your kid will probably know before you do since the Team Rep tells the coach, who tells the swimmer. You'll probably find out if you saw your swimmer finish with one of the top three times but he isn't announced later in the top three places. Similarly, someone else DQ'd if your swimmer finished in 4th, 5th or 6th, yet is announced as one of the top three finishers. Another way to find out is by reading the official Meet Results, which are posted at the pool by 4 PM the day of the meet. You can also get results by visiting the NVSL web site or by reading the Fairfax Journal.

A Word About Officials and DQs

Every Official on the deck will always give the benefit of the doubt to the swimmer. Although the difference between legal but ugly vs illegal is sometimes close to call, any violation called by an official is an "I saw" not an "I think I saw".

Protesting Disqualifications

The Team Rep is the only person who can officially question a disqualification or any other call by an official. If something happens involving your swimmer, which you do not think is right, talk to the coach or the Team Rep. The Team Rep will initiate action in accordance with NVSL rules if thought to be appropriate.



Chapter 8: We'd Rather Have Fun Than Be in Division I

If you get to know the parents of swimmers in Division I teams, some of them will tell you that swimming isn't always fun. At the pinnacle of NVSL are the six best teams and they all want to be #1. At Virginia Hills, we like to win, but it isn't our reason for being. Some of the things we do to have fun are:

Pep rallies: Pep rallies are held Friday nights before home meets at the pool. Coaches will lead swimmers in preparing the pool for the next morning's meet: learning cheers, making posters, and setting up equipment. It's also an opportunity for coaches and the team rep to share news.

Team pictures: We take a team picture every year and we'd like your swimmer to be in it. You are not obligated to purchase a picture. Other social events: Over the course of the season we'll have a spaghetti dinner, a couple of ice cream socials, a trip to a nearby amusement park and other fun events.

Swim banquet: We cap of the season with a swim banquet, which is a pot luck dinner held at the pool the evening of divisionals. We give out awards for season accomplishments and end the evening with family relays and team presentations.

What's mandatory? While we hope you will participate in all the social activities, they are all optional. Similarly, the purchase of team suits and other team clothing items is entirely optional. What is mandatory is that you honor your commitments and have fun!

