



Descriptions of Swim Meets, Recommendations, and General Advice

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Why participate in swim meets?

Swim meets are an important part of swim team, where a swimmer can apply the work put in at practice toward a tangible, measurable goal. Meets are fun, they can build self-confidence and self-esteem, and can motivate swimmers to work hard and to apply themselves in practice.

Swimmers are not required to attend meets. However, the coaching staff encourages all MYST swimmers to do so: they motivate swimmers to practice, and they can be fun and rewarding. MYST participates in a variety of meets, so there are likely some in which your swimmer will enjoy competing, regardless of proficiency.

What’s a “Dual meet?” What are “Districts?”

MYST enters a variety of meets throughout the swim season. Some are large, competitive events drawing top swimmers in the area, while others are smaller and less intimidating for newer swimmers. Some require that swimmers make a particular qualifying time in an event before they’re allowed to swim, while others welcome all swimmers.

Throughout the season, you will hear about meets, so here are some terms with which you should be familiar:

Dual Meets are competitions between McGaw and another Y in the north Chicago area. These meets are held either at McGaw or the other Y, and last around 3 hours. They are open to all swimmers, and everyone can get something out of them. Because they’re smaller, they’re especially suited to newer and younger swimmers, since they’re less intimidating than large multi-team meets.

- Tri-Meets** are like dual meets, except they involve 3 (or more) YMCA teams. The purpose of tri-meets is generally to allow a smaller Y to participate.
- USA Meets** are large meets in which dozens of swim teams compete, usually held in large venues such as university pools. The "USA" program is a separate swim program than the YMCA program. MYST is a member of both the Y program and the USA program, so we're allowed to swim in both. The YMCA and the USA programs have separate championship swim meets: the Y holds district and area championships, while the USA program has regional and national ones. Swimmers must pay entry fees for these meets, generally around \$20.
- Districts** The YMCA District Championship meet, or "Districts," is held at the end of the swim season, around the first week in March. There is a separate meet for girls and for boys. District meets pit the best swimmers from the North Chicago district of the Illinois YMCA, of which MYST is a part. To participate in a district meet, a swimmer must achieve a minimum qualifying time in each event in which they compete, and must have swum in at least 3 Y meets. Achieving district times is a notable achievement, and should be the goal for most MYST swimmers.
- Area Meet** Swimmers who compete in Districts and achieve a qualifying Area time are allowed to compete in the Y Area meet, usually held outside of DeKalb, Illinois. Top Y swimmers in Illinois and Missouri compete at the Area meet. This used to be called the "State meet," before Illinois merged with Missouri. It's a big deal for a MYST swimmer to make the Area meet, and special attention is given to them the last week of the season.
- Y Nationals** bring together the top Y swimmers in the United States. They are held in alternating locations, generally in summer. To compete, swimmers must meet qualifying times established for the meet. Swimming in Nationals is a huge achievement: only a few MYST swimmers have done so.

USA Regional meets bring together top swimmers who are part of the USA program. Most have qualifying times. MYST traditionally competes in the Midwest Regional in St. Paul in March each year.

Invitationals are meets in which a large number of teams compete. The term comes from the fact that, historically, teams had to be invited to attend, though these days generally any team can apply and get into a meet. If MYST registers its team for an invitational meet, any MYST swimmer that fulfills whatever criteria the meet sets (such as minimum times or age) can participate. Generally, swimmers must pay their entry fees at these meets.

In which meets should my swimmer participate?

With the number and variety of meets MYST offers, there is a meet for everyone regardless of their skill and level of commitment. Here's a description of the meets MYST typically sends swimmers, in alphabetical order.

A-Plus meet at Schroeder	<i>What is it?</i>	This is a competitive USA meet held in Brown Deer Wisconsin in February.
	<i>Who should attend?</i>	Anyone who achieves a minimum qualifying time for the meet, which are posted on the MYST website.
	<i>What should I know about it?</i>	We recommend you stay overnight in Brown Deer.
Area Meet	<i>What is it?</i>	The YMCA Area Meet is a YMCA meet that brings top swimmers from Illinois and Missouri together to compete. It has been held in the DeKalb area for the past 2 years. It generally is held around the middle of March.
	<i>Who should attend?</i>	Everyone who achieves a qualifying time in the Districts are strongly encouraged to attend.
	<i>What should I know about it?</i>	Making the Area meet is a big deal for a MYST swimmer. It's our Super Bowl. Swimmers should know the area qualifying times and be working throughout the year to meet those times.
BR Ryall	<i>What is it?</i>	This is a large USA meet held at the UIC natatorium. It includes morning / afternoon Sat/Sun sessions (4 in all).

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	<i>Who should attend?</i>	Red, Blue, and Senior swimmers
	<i>What should I know about it?</i>	This is the last USA meet of the season for MYST.
Buehler Pentathlon	<i>What is it?</i>	This meet, held at the Buehler YMCA in Palatine, has swimmers compete in 5 events: back, breast, butterfly, and free, and Ims (all 4 together in one event).
	<i>Who should attend?</i>	Everyone is encouraged to attend. This is a great meet for trying out all events in a competitive situation.
	<i>What should I know about it?</i>	Bring captain's chairs! They house swimmers and parents in the gym, so you need to bring seating. A sleeping bag is great here as well.
		It's likely the afternoon sessions start late, and run until 5-6 pm.
Districts	<i>What is it?</i>	A large meet for all YMCA teams in the Chicago district (about 9 YMCAs).
	<i>Who should attend?</i>	Everyone who qualifies for districts, by achieving minimum times, and who attends at least 3 Y meets. One must qualify for each event one swims. If a swimmer only qualifies for 1 event, we still recommend they go, in order to experience a championship venue.
	<i>What should I know about it?</i>	McGaw traditionally hosts the boys districts: it's our major fundraiser for the year.
		Plan on being at districts all day: it's a long meet. Bring plenty to read and do.
District Classics	<i>What is it?</i>	This is a Y championship meet held for Y swimmers who do not qualify for districts. It is held around the same time as districts.
	<i>Who should attend?</i>	Everyone who does not qualify for districts in any event.
	<i>What should I know about it?</i>	If your swimmer doesn't qualify for districts, definitely encourage them to compete in the "Classics." It's a chance to compete with similar swimmers and hence a chance to take home a medal.
Dual Meets (and Tri-Meets)	<i>What are they?</i>	Dual meets are competitions between MYST and another YMCA in the district. Occasionally, we'll do tri-meets that include a smaller Y with which it wouldn't make sense to hold a dual. We host about 4-6 dual meets a year at McGaw, and travel to other Ys around the area to engage in more.

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Who should attend? Everyone! Dual meets are a great opportunity for newer and less experienced swimmers to gain experience in competition. For seasoned swimmers, they are a chance to turn in better times in various events. And, since many are held at McGaw, it's easy to participate.

What should I know about them? Bring a sleeping bag for your swimmer to sit on.

We can always use parents' help at these events: we don't require more than 2 hours.

It's a great chance to meet other parents and to cheer for the team.

Gender Wars

What is it?

This is an annual YMCA meet at Niles West High School in which boys and girls compete in the same events. It is a relatively large meet. It is run on a single day, usually a Sunday.

Who should attend?

Everyone is encouraged: this is a great chance for up-and-coming swimmers to experience a large meet, though it's slightly less competitive than the large USA meets we attend.

What should I know about it?

Niles West offers bleachers for visitors, so you won't need captain's chairs.

Intrasquad

What is it?

This is the first meet of the year, where MYST swimmers compete with each other. It's typically held in October. It also gives us a chance to test timing equipment.

Who should attend?

All MYST swimmers, even (and particularly) ones who have never competed before. This meet is a great introduction to meets. It also provides a baseline for times: swimmers can compare their later times to the ones they turn in at this meet, to see how much they've improved.

What should I know about it?

Nothing, really. It's held at McGaw and is a low-key affair.

Mustang Classic

What is it?

This is a popular USA meet held out in Barrington Illinois, at Barrington high school.

Who should attend?

This is a competitive meet, so we recommend red, blue, and senior swimmers.

What should I know about it?

They offer convenient seating, so you won't need captain's chairs or sleeping bags for this meet.

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MYAS Midwest Regionals	<i>What is it?</i>	This is a USA meet for programs in the upper Midwest, held in St. Paul around the time of Evanston's spring break. It's a fun, end-of-year get-together for MYST people.
	<i>Who should attend?</i>	Everyone who makes a relatively low qualifying time is welcome, which includes most red, blue, and senior swimmers.
	<i>What should I know about it?</i>	Part of the weekend includes a MYST trip to Mall of America, which for many swimmers, is the true highlight of the trip.
Oktoberfest at Glenbrook Aquatics	<i>What is it?</i>	This is an invitational USA meet involving a dozen teams around the area. It is generally the first USA meet we attend.
	<i>Who should attend?</i>	The meet does not have qualifying times, but does have a competitive field, so younger and less-competitive swimmers might not enjoy it as much as seasoned swimmers. Red, Blue, and Senior swimmers are encouraged to attend; it is optional for everyone else.
	<i>What should I know about it?</i>	If you wish to compete in this meet, make this known to the coaching staff early in the season! The cutoff for entries is typically in the middle of September.
Prelim/Final by the Patriot Aquatic swim club	<i>What is it?</i>	This is a large USA meet hosted at Stevenson High School.
	<i>Who should attend?</i>	All red, blue, and senior swimmers.
	<i>What should I know about it?</i>	They have great seating on carpet-covered seats in a balcony off the floor, while swimmers are offered bleachers at poolside. You won't need captain's chairs or sleeping bags for this meet.
Ten and Under Wonder	<i>What is it?</i>	This is an invitational meet we host at McGaw each year. It is one of two big fundraising events we hold.
	<i>Who should attend?</i>	All MYST swimmers that are 10 years old or younger as of the beginning of the swimming season. This is a great meet for younger swimmers: there are separate events by age, so 6-year-olds compete against 6-year-olds, and so on. So, swimmers 7 and 9 years old have a better chance of earning ribbons, since they not competing against 8 and 10 year olds.
	<i>What should I know about it?</i>	Regardless of whether your swimmer is competing, we ask that all parents lend a helping hand at the meet. If you can't be at

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		the meet, you can help with setup or breakdown.
Windy City Open at UIC (Lake Forest swim club)	<i>What is it?</i>	This is a large USA invitational meet held down at the UIC natatorium. It's a large meet, and often the first one we'll do after Christmas break.
	<i>Who should attend</i>	It is recommended for Red, Blue, and senior swimmers.
	<i>What should I know about it.</i>	It's usually held in January but entries are due in December, so get your request in early. The UIC Natatorium offers bleachers, so you don't need captain's chairs. Traditionally, MYST sits in the northeast corner of the arena, so come over there to sit with other parents and your swimmer with other swimmers.
YMCA Finalist Meet ("Y-Finalist")	<i>What is it?</i>	This is a large, invitational meet for YMCAs held in Brown Deer, Wisconsin, a suburb north of Milwaukee. The Y-Finalist, or "Brown Deer" meet as it's often called, has become a tradition for MYST families: people book rooms at a nearby motel, and we have a pizza and happy hour get-together in the motel lobby on Saturday.
	<i>Who should attend?</i>	Everyone is encouraged to attend this meet: it's fun not only for the swimmers, but also for parents. Everyone makes friends, and gets to know each other. Plus, the Schroeder pool is extremely fast, meaning your swimmer will likely turn in some very fast times.
	<i>What should I know about it?</i>	Sign up and reserve your motel room early, since they do fill up. They run morning and afternoon sessions, so check the Schroeder website to find out when your swimmer is competing. Morning sessions start early, so plan to either leave very early or to head up Friday night. Plan to have a ball!

How do meets work?

Most meets are run the same way:

- **Enter a meet.** Swimmers are entered by their teams into specific events at a meet. In the case of large invitational meets, this must be done as much as a month in advance. So, in the fall and again in the winter, when we distribute meet sign-up forms, *fill them out and get them back to us quickly!* With dual meets, in contrast, coaches have more flexibility in entering swimmers into the meet, sometimes even the same day. So, if you didn't sign up your swimmer and decide you want to them to compete, just email Michael or Craig.

Here's some things to know about how swimmers are entered into meets, and when they compete:

- Larger invitational meets are usually broken into morning and afternoon sessions, often on both Saturday and Sunday. These divisions are based on age group: for example, 8-and-unders and 15-and-olders in the morning, and 9-10 and 11-12's in the afternoon. Dual meets are always done in a single, afternoon session. To find out which session is relevant to your swimmer, get the "*meet packet.*" These are available from the MYST website and newsletter, as well as by going to the web page for the meet (do an internet search on the meet's name).
- At most meets, swimmers can compete in no more than 3 *events*, plus relays. The coaches spend a lot of time deciding what events are appropriate for what swimmers: if they're close to district times in an event, for example, they might be entered into that event to give them another chance to qualify.
- **What to bring.** For all meets, it's helpful to bring the following:
 - MYST swimsuit
 - Goggles (having 2 pairs is great, in case one is lost or broken)
 - MYST swim cap (swimmers are each given one a season)
 - 2 or 3 towels (these get wet after each event, so the more the merrier)

- Sweatpants and sweatshirt to keep swimmers warm between events
 - Clogs or flip-flops
 - Reading material, cards, or other diversions, since there is downtime between events for most swimmers. Coach your swimmer to store electronic equipment while competing, so it isn't stolen
 - Snacks (ideally low-sugar, such as fruit, granola bars, and so on). Food is usually offered for sale at meets.
 - Bottles of gatorade or water
 - Sleeping bag: this provides swimmers with a warm, soft spot to lounge.
 - Captain's chairs. For meets that host swimmers and parents in a gym, these give you and your swimmer a place to sit. Don't bring them to any meet at the UIC Natatorium: they provide seating for you and your swimmer.
 - Reading material for yourself: there is usually a fair amount of time between your swimmer's events, and this gives you something to do.
- **Check-in.** Many meets have what's called "positive check-in." This means that the swimmer or their parent must go to a check-in table and highlight their swimmer on a list. If a swimmer's name is not highlighted by the cut-off time, that swimmer will be scratched from the meet. The purpose of this is to allow meet officials to re-configure and compress the heats by removing swimmers who aren't swimming, and so shorten the length of the meet. But, it means that, if a meet says it's a positive check-in meet, you must be there and check the swimmer in by the prescribed time, or the swimmer will not be allowed to compete (the term used is "scratched"). If you are running late to a meet, try calling a parent at the meet or one of the coaches to get them to check in your swimmer.
 - **Be ready to go.** Swimmers should be in their suits and ready to go into the water when warm-up period begins. They should find the coaches when they arrive, who will direct them to where the team will reside and make sure they get in the water at the appropriate place and time for warm-up.

- **Warm-up.** For a given session at a meet, there is a warm-up period in which swimmers get acclimated to the water and loosened up. Because there are usually a lot of teams and only a limited number of lanes, each team is assigned a time and lane within the warm-up period: hence, the meet information might say that warm-ups begin at noon, though MYST isn't scheduled to warm-up until 12:40. Unfortunately, this information is often not shared with the team until the day of the meet.
- **Meet conduct.** After the warm-up is done, the meet begins. Meets are run in event order. When meets have more swimmers than lanes for a given event, they break swimmers into "heats." Most meets offer a "heat sheet," often for a price, that lists each event, heat, and lane for each swimmer. Heat sheets are usually available shortly after the start of the meet. Coaches usually write the event, heat, and lane on each swimmers' arm, so they know when to compete.
- **Bullpen.** If larger meets include younger swimmers, they often run a "bullpen," which are rows of chairs in which they stage swimmers leading up to an event. This way, they can spot swimmers who aren't in attendance and track them down. If a bullpen is run, swimmers and/or parents need to watch the board to see which events are being called to the bullpen. Bullpens generally have coordinators on hand to get children into position: swimmers should check in with them to be placed appropriately.
- **Watching the meet.** Many swimming venues have only limited seating. It is generally polite to move into the seating at such venues to watch your child, then to move out of the area when your child has finished competing.
- **Viewing results.** Meet officials will post swim times and places on a wall at periodic intervals through a session: check these from time to time to see how your swimmer did. Swim times are always posted to the MYST website as well, in the days following the meet: click on "Meet Entries and Results" in the left column on the MYST home page, then select the meet.
- **Leaving early.** While we recommend you stay for the entire meet, if your swimmer must leave early, please inform a coach. This will

prevent them from running around looking for your swimmer before an event, and will enable them to juggle a relay team.

- ***Help us by offering to time!*** At every meet we attend, home or away, we need to provide timers. Please volunteer for this duty! It's very easy to do, even if you've had no experience, and it gives you the best seats in the house.