

# PRELIMS AND FINALS AND CHAMPIONSHIPS, OH MY!

If your child is getting ready for a championship-level swim meet, then the meet likely has a prelims session, followed by an evening finals session. Think track and field or speedskating. OK, maybe you don't live up north.

A prelims/finals meet begins with all swimmers competing in a morning session. \*In each event, the fastest 24 (or 8, or 16, or 32 – depends on the meet!) seeded swimmers are seeded using *championship seeding* or *circle seeding* in the final three heats. This means that the fastest-seeded swimmer swims in the fastest inside lane (lane 4 in an eight-lane pool) in the final prelims heat. The second-fastest swims in lane four of the second-to-last prelims heat. The third-fastest swims in lane four of the third-to-last prelims heat. Confused yet? (may be first 3 heats if seeding is fast to slow)

We start again with the fourth fastest swimmer, who will swim in lane 5 of the fastest heat. The fifth fastest swimmer is in lane 5 of the second fastest heat. The sixth fastest swimmer is in lane 5 of the third fastest heat.

Repeat. Again, and again, until all 8 lanes in all three heats have been filled.

Many parents have asked me the purpose for this. In every prelims/finals swim meet, this is the seeding that is followed. Maybe it is so that the top three seeds do not have to swim at 100% to make finals. Maybe it's to mix it up in the morning so we have a whole new race in the evening.

What is definite is that circle seeding ensures that the top 3 swimmers in each event get the presumed fastest lane in the pool. (Lane 4 in an eight-lane pool is considered the ideal lane.)

After the prelims in an event and/or age group are completed, the meet hosts will announce the finalists, who will return in the evening finals session for round 2. Swimmers are given a window of time to *scratch*, which means they can declare they won't swim that event in finals. This does happen, which is why there are always two alternate finalists listed just in case.

Every championship swim meet is different, so you may only have the top 8 return (often called the "A" final or championship heat), while other meets will have the top 16 (a Consolation or "B" final) or 24 ("C" final) swim in finals.

(A "D" final is also a possibility. In some swim meets, the meet organizers will reserve the C or D final for the next 8 fastest swimmers under a certain age. This is common only in swim meets that have no age group designations.)

## **Common questions about prelims/final meets**

### **What happens if your swimmer misses his finals race?**

Be prepared for your swimmer to pay a fine or be banned from his/her next event. It's good etiquette to scratch from a final in a timely manner so the alternate can race instead; it's bad form to miss.

**Let's say your swimmer is seeded 9th in the consolation or "B" finals.** During the finals session, she swims faster than four swimmers in the top 8 heat. Does your swimmer finish fifth overall?

Nope. You cannot place out of your finals heat. So, if you are in the top 8, the worst you can place is 8th. If you're in the "B" final, the highest you can place is 9th and so on.

### **Should my swimmer really be ready to go if he's an alternate?**

Absolutely. Crazy things happen. People slip on deck, swimmers get food poisoning between sessions, parents don't get the message that their child made finals. This could all mean there's an empty lane during finals. When the starter sees an empty lane, he makes a call for that alternate. Be ready.

This is even more important on the meet's final night. Often swimmers will decide to head home early because they've traveled a long distance to the meet or they have early-morning commitments (work, school).

### **How do I know if my swimmer made finals?**

This is up to you and your swimmer to find out. The meet host will post the finalists near the results, and the Clerk of Course will keep a record. It's up to you to stick around and see how your swimmer placed. Don't rely on your coach, another swimmer or Meet Mobile, which can often be wrong.

### **Does my swimmer really need to warm up for finals?**

If your coach says so (and she probably will), then yes. Getting a good warm-up is essential to a good race.

### **What should we do between prelims and finals?**

Eat a good meal to help your swimmer refuel (carbs and some protein), drink water, and REST! Even lying in bed for a few minutes will help. Avoid the temptation to go shopping, sit through a two-hour meal, or ask your swimmer to go for a short jog.

Drinking chocolate milk immediately after the last swim in the morning session provides many benefits and aids in recovery, helping your athlete prepare for the afternoon/evening session.

### **Should my swimmer wear his "fast" suit for prelims?**

This is probably best left to the swimmer and coach to decide, and the answer will vary depending on the swimmer.

For younger athletes, wearing their primary racing suit for both prelims and finals is ideal. (Tech suits likely aren't needed for athletes under age 12.) They need to be prepared to race in the morning to make finals. Wearing their racing suit helps put them in the proper state of mind.

For older swimmers, you'll see some athletes swim prelims in their racing suits and others in practice suits. The reasons are varied: each athlete has different goals heading into the race. Some swimmers may have to give 110% to make finals while others may only need to swim at 90% to get in. Some teams may use this method across the board.

Don't be surprised when swimmers drop additional time during finals. Swimmers often are faster at night, when their bodies are fully awake. That is when it is time to race when a swimmer knows what's at stake. It is exciting!

If you have a younger swimmer and you are new to the sport, make it a point to watch the finals session of a championship meet even if your child does not qualify for finals. You will be treated to fast swimming and exciting race