

Swimming Time Standards Explained

USA Swimming Sets Standards -- or 'Cuts' -- for Every Age and Ability Level

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USA Swimming is the national governing body for the sport of swimming in the United States. The 400,000-member service organization "promotes the culture of swimming by creating opportunities for swimmers and coaches of all backgrounds to participate and advance in the sport through clubs, events and education," according to the group.

USA Swimming helps select and train teams for international competition including the Olympics, but the group's members also include swimmers of every age and ability level nationally.

In addition, the group sets swimming time standards -- or 'cuts' -- each year for each of its major meets, so that swimmers from young age-group meets through the Olympic Trials know what times they need to achieve to "make their next cut."

NATIONAL MEET STANDARDS

To qualify for USA Swimming's national meets, swimmers must post minimum qualifying times during the qualifying period. The standards are set for national meets for swimmers of various ages and abilities, such as the AT&T Short Course National Championships, Junior National Championships, and ConocoPhillips National Championships. Times vary greatly depending on the age and ability group for the meet.

USA Swimming posts time standards for races measured in short course yards or long course meters. For the Junior National Championships in August 2017, for example, the time standard -- or 'cut' time -- for the 50 freestyle swimming event is 22.89 seconds for the girls for SCY and 26.69 for the girls for LCM; for the boys in the same event, the time standards are 20.59 for the SCY and 24.09 for the LCM.

Swimmers must meet these minimum standards to qualify to compete in the meet.

AGE GROUP STANDARDS

Age group time standards are designed to encourage age group swimmers "to step their swimming up to the next level," says USA swimming. Times are listed for groups including B, BB, A, AA, AAA and AAAA. These standards can also be used to offer swimmers a general idea how they match up with other swimmers in their age group and between age-groups, but raw times work better within age groups.

Just because a swimmer has "AAA" times as a 9 or 10 year old does not mean that same swimmer will get "AAA" times as a 13 or 14 year old.

GROUP COMPARISONS

For example, the 2016-2017 Scholastic All-American time standards for the 50 freestyle swimming race were 23.46 for the women for SCY and 26.99 for women for the LCM, according to the group. For the men, the time standards for the same race were 20.99 for the men's SCY and 24.39 for the men's LCM. As you can see, these times are just a bit slower than the junior national championship times.

By contrast, the 2017-2020 "National Age Group Motivational Times" for 10-year-old girls in the AAA group for the 50 freestyle swimming race are 32.79 for the LCM and 28.89 for the SCY; for 10 year old AAA boys, the standards for the same race are 31.89 for the LCM and 31.59 for the SCY. The times show just how far the AAA 10 year olds would have to improve over the years to reach Olympic-competition standards.