



Heat Flighting

By: Ron Van Pool

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When considering whether to flight heats, the interest of the athletes should be first and foremost. As with many decisions relative to the conduct of swimming competitions, there are many factors to be evaluated before deciding to flight heats. Among the factors to be considered are the following items.

Level of the Competition: Generally, flighting should only be considered for higher level meets (sectionals and above). These meets typically provide opportunities for individual athletes to qualify for higher-level meets and, in turn, qualify for national-level teams. Lower-level meets are important to athlete progression but are also important to their team's success.

Purpose of the Meet: The organization governing the competition often has objectives for the competition, such as a key, direct step to qualifying for a higher, national-level meet or team. Among those setting the meet objectives may be the USA Swimming National Team, Coaches Advisory Committee, or zone-level committees.

Meet Size and Timelines: A large meet with a timeline approaching five hours and a limited time between prelims and finals may argue for flighting to allow portions of teams to have a break before finals. Creating flighted events may allow parts of teams to leave the competition early but may also divide the team and the team atmosphere. Depending on team size and resources it may not be possible to transport some of the team while others are still competing. Another consideration is the qualifying and seeding process for the meet (eg, bonus events and seeding sequence [long-course meter times, short-course meter times, and short-course yard times]). A senior-level athlete may not be entered in the first seeding level that could qualify for the top-flighted heats and could be placed in later heats to their detriment.

Flighting Process: In order to flight a session, the Meet Announcement must first include the provision for flighting. The recommendation and agreement to flight heats must then be made at the Technical (General) Meeting with coach endorsement. The flighted events should have no less than four or five heats in the first flight of the fastest swimmers and more than two heats in the second flight.

Flighting heats is an effective tool in certain circumstances, but it is key to remember what is the best for all the athletes. HAVE A GREAT MEET!