

Strokes, Turns and Course Information

Freestyle: The competitor may swim any stroke he/she wishes. The usual stroke used is the "crawl"; characterized by the alternate overhand motion of the arms and an alternating up-and-down flutter kick. The freestyle is swum over 50, 100, 200, 400, 800 and 1500 meter distances.

Backstroke: The swimmer must stay on his/her back at all times, except at the turn. The usual stroke consists of an alternating motion of the arms with a flutter kick.

Butterfly: Perhaps the most beautiful stroke. It features overhand stroke of the arms combined with an undulating dolphin kick. In the kick, the swimmer must keep both legs together and may not flutter scissors or use the whip kick. The butterfly was developed in the early 1950's as a variation of the breaststroke. It became an Olympic stroke in 1956 in Melbourne. On turns and at the finish, the swimmer must touch the wall with both hands simultaneously.

Breaststroke: It is perhaps, one of the more difficult strokes to master. It requires simultaneous movements of the arms on the same horizontal plane. The hands are pulled from the breast in a heart-shaped pattern and recovered under or over the surface of the water. The kick is a synchronized, somewhat circular motion, similar to the action of a frog. No flutter, scissors or dolphin kick is permitted. On turns and at the finish, the swimmer must touch the wall with both hands simultaneously.

Individual Medley: It is commonly referred to as the "IM" and features all four strokes. In the IM the swimmer begins with the butterfly, then changes after one-fourth of the race to the backstroke then breaststroke, and finally freestyle.

Medley Relay: All four strokes are swum. The first swimmer swims the backstroke, the second, breaststroke, the third, butterfly, and the final swimmer, freestyle.

Freestyle Relay: This consists of four freestylers, each swimming one quarter of the total distance of the event.

Starts and Turns: Many races are won or lost by the swimmer's performance in the start and turn. In the start, the swimmers are asked to step up onto the starting blocks (or in the water for backstroke) by the blow of one long whistle. The starter then commands the field to "take your mark". When all swimmers are set (motionless) the starting horn is sounded to start the race. If the starter feels that one swimmer has moved, left early or obtained an unfair advantage, the race will be recalled. Under Swim Canada rules, one false start disqualifies the swimmer.

The Course: Competition pools may be "short course" (25 meters) or "long course" (50 meters). The international standard used in the Olympics is 50 meters.