

USA SWIMMING BASIC INFORMATION

The Bellefonte YMCA Swimming team will be applying for membership in the USA swimming program in December. The coaching staff and the YMCA leadership expect this to greatly enhance the opportunities available to our swimmers in the future. Joining USA is strictly voluntary; the choice is up to each family. The cost per year is \$57 per swimmer. This will be a fee additional to the regular swim team fees. I realize that many of our families have questions, so I will attempt to explain what USA swimming is all about.

USA swimming is a swimming organization that runs parallel to the YMCA swimming and diving program. A swimmer may be a member of both; in fact, it is encouraged. A swimmer who is a member of both organizations has an advantage, as the USA swimming program fills gaps in the YMCA program. For example:

The YMCA program is based on dual meets. USA is based on a seeded invitational format. Swimmers enter events voluntarily and swim against competition of similar ability and speed. Rather than swim for team wins, swimmers attempt to make certain time cuts (D, C, B, A, AA, AAA, and AAAA). Meets are done in the preliminary (morning) and final (evening) format. Swimmers benefit by acclimating to championship style meets.

The YMCA program is from December to March (if you go to districts and states) while the USA is year round. A swimmer may swim in important meets in every month. This is helpful for those training in the off season, as it helps them reach benchmarks. A USA swimmer doesn't have to follow the "all of our eggs are in the district meet basket" approach to swimming.

The USA website is a treasure trove of information for swimmers, coaches, and families. Access to this data base is worth the \$57 for any swimmer that is looking to improve.

The YMCA has only one distance for each stroke at any given meet (except freestyle). USA meets give swimmers the opportunity to swim a

variety of distances in each stroke. 10 and unders can swim the 500 freestyle or the 200 breaststroke, for example.

For anyone looking to swim in more championship style meets; swim competitively throughout the year; and swim in different distance events, then the USA provides a great value for your \$57. There is no extra training, no extra practice, and no mandatory attendance. Once a person joins, going to meets is strictly voluntary. I look at this as merely opening up opportunities for our swimmers. There are only two negatives – there is no 8 and under age group, and the meets are 2 to 3 days long (that is why we plan to go only to the ones within easy driving distance – like Penn State and Bucknell).

Again, I encourage you to give the USA a chance. If you have any questions, feel free to ask.