

The following email message was something I shared with the parents of my own club (Kildaire Farms) last year, but which others may also find generally useful...

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**From:** Bob Goudreau [mailto:BobGoudreau@nc.rr.com]  
**Sent:** Monday, June 26, 2006 11:42 PM  
**To:** 'SwimTeam@KildaireFarmClub.com'  
**Subject:** A Brief History of Time(s), or "Why isn't my child's event time shown on the bulletin board?"

As Head Timer, something that I experience every season at about this point is parents noticing that the swim team bulletin board is missing a time for an event that they are **positive** that their child swam in a recent meet. In this message, I'm going to describe how we gather swimmer times, what can go wrong with that process, and some things we can do to avoid those problems.

Those of you who have filled the timer job at swim meets know the basics already. Each team is assigned half the lanes in the pool (the home team in the odd-numbered lanes and the visiting team in the even-numbered ones). Kildaire Farms opts to dedicate two parent timers to each Kildaire Farms lane. Usually, this ensures that we have at least one good time result for each "splash" in that lane. The two timers serve as backups to each other, so if one of them misses a start, it is quite likely that the other timer got a good time for that swimmer, though there are a few missing times that can be attributed to the very rare case of a double timer failure. If both timers managed to record good times (the usual case), we use the average of the two times.

This system works pretty well as long as the swimmers are clearly identifiable (which is why legible swimmer numbers are important) and our swimmers stay exclusively in the Kildaire Farms lanes. However, it can break down in the later heats of age groups in which we have more swimmers than the other team has. The problem is that TSA rules instruct the Clerks of Course (one from each team) to fill otherwise-empty lanes with swimmers from the other team, in the interests of moving the meet along faster by reducing the total number of heats. This means that the Clerks of Course might assign some Kildaire Farms swimmers to the visiting team's lanes, even though our coach's heat sheets had designated those swimmers to compete in KF lanes in some later heat. Since this lane-filling is completely dependent on who actually showed up for that event from each team, it is done dynamically in real-time, which means that we have little or no advance notice that a Killer Whale swimmer is being relegated to the "wrong" lane.

Once one of our swimmers is in one of the opponent's lanes, the possibility of a "lost" time looms much larger. We are at the mercy of the other team's timer(s), if any. While we do ask that they always time every swimmer in their lane, regardless of team affiliation, a lot can still go wrong. For starters, their timers might not be willing or able to abide by our request. Even if they do time our swimmer, they may not know exactly what they should do with that time. Ideally, they should record the swimmer's time and swimmer number and save it to give to us later, or immediately give that information to one of the Kildaire Farms timers near them. However, dismayingly often, even with the best intentions from all parties involved, the ball gets dropped along the way and we never get proper time data for our swimmer.

Note that everything I described above can work in reverse when the other team has the larger contingent in an age group. That's why I always instruct our timers to time **every single splash** in their lane and to cooperate with their counterparts in the adjacent lane when any of the other team's kids swim in our lane. Our timers are also equipped with a supplemental timing sheet exclusively for recording the times of any opponents that may have swum in their lanes. That way, they can write down the stroke/time/swimmer-number data of all opposing swimmers that happen to use their lane during the course of the meet and simply hand that entire data sheet over to the other team at the end of the meet. However, not all of our opponents are willing or

able to go the extra mile for us, and there is no real requirement that they time anyone at all (even their own swimmers), so we can only rely on their goodwill.

So, what steps can we take to reduce the casualty rate for swimmer times?

**If you are a timer...** the best thing you can do is to introduce yourself to your counterpart(s) in the adjacent lane before the meet starts (Lane 1 should pair with Lane 2; 3 with 4; etc.), and discuss how you will cooperate with each other in the event that either of you ends up with the other team's swimmer in your lane. If one of the other team's timers later informs you that he or she has a time for you, don't hesitate to record it on your timing form. It would help if you would put a little notation besides the swimmer's name in such cases (e.g., write "L4" if you're timing in Lane 3 but your counterpart in Lane 4 gives you a time for a Killer Whale who swam in that lane). Also, if you can, be on the lookout for Killer Whales swim caps or the "KF" swimmer number logo in the lane next to yours, and ask your neighbor for a time for he or she doesn't volunteer it to you. And of course, turnabout is fair play, so remember to either keep your neighbor informed when you time one of their swimmers ("your swimmer 243 had a time of 34.69"), or write it down on the "Other Team's Times" form on your clipboard if your neighbor isn't prepared to accept data from you at that moment due to the meet pace

**If you are a parent...** and you notice that your child is in one of the "wrong" lanes during a heat, pay careful attention to the timers at the end of the race. If you don't observe them talking to any nearby KF timers, politely ask the nearest KF timer if they could make sure they asked the other team's timers for your child's time. This works best for the 7-10 year olds, since the timers stand at the relatively uncrowded far end of the pool during 25-yard events. Timers for the 6-and-under events stand off on the side of the pool, making it much harder for outside observers to figure out who's timing which lanes. The 11-and-up swimmers finish at the block end of the pool, which is already very busy with the Clerks of Course and several rows of later heats all lined up to go, so it may be harder to catch the ear of a KF timer from the edge of the roped-off area.

**If you are a swimmer...** and you find yourself assigned by the Clerk of Course to the other team's lane, don't panic! When you get out of the pool at the end of the race, be sure to identify yourself as a KF swimmer and politely ask your timer(s) to make sure they give your time and swimmer number to a KF timer in an adjacent lane.

As always, if you notice any mistakes or omissions in the publicly posted "cumulative times" chart, please don't hesitate to contact me. Even if all the timing logistics work perfectly, I have been known to make the occasional typo ☺ when transcribing data from timing form to computer screen. If you spot something that looks fishy, I will be happy to go back and check the original timing forms and fix the error.

Hope this helps,

Bob