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started in the pool,



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

There are four strokes in competitive swimming. The freestyle which is my personal favourite has no restrictions. The three other styles are the backstroke, the breaststroke, which is commonly called as frog style, and the butterfly. The mechanics and the turns are strictly regulated in these three strokes. Freestyle races in major championships are over 50m, 100m, 200m, 400m and 1500m for men, with the 800m instead of the 1500m for women. In the other three strokes, both men and woman race over 100m and 200m. There are medley races for both men and woman, over 200m and 400m, in which each stroke is swum for 50m and 100m respectively, the order being butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke and freestyle.

Relay races include 4x100m and 4x200m, as well as a medley 4x 100m relay in which the order of the strokes is backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly and freestyle. The standard long-course swimming events take place in Olympic-size pools, which measure 50m approximately and which have eight lanes, 2.3m wide. Competitors dive in from starting blocks, except for the backstroke, which is started in the pool, and are timed to the $\frac{1}{1000}$ of a second by touching the electronic pads at the finish.

Swimmers must keep in their own lanes, marked with ropes on the surface. Lines of flags hang over the pool to let backstrokers know when they are within 5m of a turn or the finish. The competitor with the fastest entry time is assigned the lane on the right of the centre line. Slower swimmers are assigned lanes alternately to the left and right with the slowest swimmers in the outside lanes. If entry times are an indicator of form, the swimmers should spread out into a spearhead formation. Michael Phelps an American swimmer won a record eight medals for swimming at the 2004 Olympic

Games in Athens. The American swimmers are the highest medal takers at the Olympics.

There are various other sports that are associated with swimming like synchronized swimming, long distance swimming and water polo. Swimming for fitness is an activity which offers health benefits for a lifetime and is well worth the effort it takes to get into the pool. It increases lung capacity and makes the heart pump better. It gives you the chance to hang around with friends frolicking in the water. It gives you respite from the heat.

Regular swimming builds endurance, muscle strength, and cardio-vascular fitness. It can serve as a cross-training element to your regular workouts. Besides, people all ages can swim. As swimming is a non-weight bearing exercise it is easy on the joints and even people with arthritis can swim without worrying that the exercise might ruin their bones further. Swimming burns calories a mile per pound of body weight so it's a good exercise for weight loss as well. There are many psychological benefits to swimming. If you relax and swim with very little effort and let your mind wander focusing on nothing but the rhythm of your stroke before long a feeling of well-being settles similar to the feeling one gets from meditation.

For me swimming is a mixture of exercise and fun. Spending time floating on my back listening to the water lap my feet is so soothing and relaxing that it makes me wish I didn't ever have to step out of the water.