

AGE GROUP REPORT

Potomac Valley has continued to grow over the past few years, and is now ranked 5th in size and only a few hundred athletes behind 4th. We are currently over 10,000 registered athletes and the traditional Olympic year increase has yet to happen. As a result we have been faced with some changing dynamics. Larger Open meets, more athletes competing regularly, larger entry numbers at Championship meets, etc. Many facilities have started clamping down on numbers of athletes on deck and spectators in stands, which has only increased the challenges we face as an LSC in attempting to run our programs.

An illustration of what we face is evident in looking at two meets recently held at Fairland. The Early Bird meet closed out at roughly 4700 splashes and had timelines from 8:00 am to 8:00 pm on Saturday and 7:00 pm on Sunday. By contrast, the following weekend there was a MD LSC meet at Fairland which also closed out. Their numbers were about 2700 splashes and timelines that ran from 8:00 am to 5:30 pm on Saturday and 4:30 pm on Sunday.

Our JO meet continues to grow with the exception of this past year. Though many considered the cuts as very deep and potentially yielding a very small meet, the resulting reduction in meet size was very little (roughly 260 fewer splashes). Our LC Age Group Champs went from 4100 to 4450 to 4860 splashes from 2009 through 2011. And in each year the QT's got faster.

Many have expressed the idea that they did NOT want our JO and LC Age Group meets becoming too 'elite'. Others felt that as these two meets are Potomac Valley Championship meets for our age groupers that we should be seeking to maintain or increase athlete participation. Others have expressed the idea that we should have a system whereby as our LSC grows so do our Champ meets, otherwise we end up with a smaller percentage of athletes in these meets.

The simple reality is that we continue to try and tweak our age group program. We're bursting at the seams and it's time to take a fresh look and probably revamp our Championship meets. Our facilities are not getting larger as our LSC grows. The number of top level, high quality facilities has remained the same the past few years. Some facilities are more accessible than others, and some are more cost friendly. Some meets change considerably in size depending on which side of the river they fall on. These are all factors that need considering as we move forward and continue to grow. It's quite possible we hit 11,000 to 11,500 athletes within the next 2 years.

A few ideas that have been tossed out at the past few competition meetings are to split our JO meet into an 'A' and 'B' level meet. Many smaller LSC's already have a Gold and Silver JO format. Use of single age group cuts has been suggested. Many years ago we ran this format. We've also tossed out splitting preliminary sessions into 2 courses and running Finals at one facility. This could be used for both JO's and LC Age Groups.

At the end of the day, Potomac Valley is a large LSC with some great facilities. Not all meets can (or necessarily should) be run at our top venues. We do need to start the process of thinking differently and coming up with some options that will meet our current objectives and also allow for our projected growth over the next Olympic quadrennial period.

Manga Dalizu
Age Group Chair