

Inside the Rulebook – Breaststroke

Breaststroke is the grand-daddy of the swimming strokes, with its origins going back as far as the Stone Age: drawings in an Egyptian cave depict swimmers performing the stroke. The first time the breaststroke was contested at the Olympics was in 1904 in St. Louis, remarkable for the fact it was the only Olympics that was held in yards rather than meters.

It's a complex stroke that can be difficult to master. Fortunately our coaches are experts at teaching the stroke to young swimmers!

Breaststroke is a cycled stroke. That means that there is a pattern to the strokes and kicks. The swimmer may take one stroke and one kick in that order. The cycle is repeated throughout the race. The only exception occurs in the first cycle after the start and after each turn. In these cycles, the swimmer is permitted (but not required) to take a single butterfly kick prior to the breaststroke kick.

About that breaststroke kick. All movements of the legs must be simultaneous and in the same plane. Both feet must be turned out in the propulsive part of the kick, with the swimmer essentially pushing from the bottoms of the feet. Some people liken it to the way a frog kicks while swimming.

As for the stroke, the hands are pushed forward together from the breast; the hands may not be brought back beyond the hipline, except for the first stroke after the start and after each turn. All movements of the arms must be simultaneous and in the same horizontal plane (i.e., parallel to the water surface). The elbows must maintain contact with the water throughout the race. The head must break the surface of the water at some point in each cycle.

Lots of rules, huh?

At the turns and the finish, a two hand touch is required. The two hands must touch simultaneously and may not be stacked on top of one another.