

How is My Child's Official Time Determined?

“The scoreboard didn't stop when my child touched the wall. By the time it stopped three more seconds had gone by!”

“The scoreboard didn't have a time for my child. It just had a blank!”

“The scoreboard said my child's time was 1:14.85. But the posted results say it was 1:13.10. Which one is correct?”

As you've probably guessed by now, the time shown on the scoreboard is not necessarily the official time. USA Swimming has very specific rules regarding how your child's official time is determined. Let's take a look at the process.

At a meet sanctioned by USA Swimming, your child is timed with one or more of the following systems:

Fully Automatic - Touchpads are the primary timing system. Timers are required to operate the plunger buttons and stopwatches as backup.

Semi-Automatic - The plunger buttons are the primary timing system. A minimum of two buttons is required, each operated by a separate timer. A backup consisting of at least one stopwatch is also required.

Manual - This type of timing uses stopwatches only. When using Manual Timing, three timers per lane are required, each operating a stopwatch.

When your child finishes the race, the time is recorded by both the primary and the backup devices, and the results are reviewed by the official who is responsible for determining the official time: the Administrative Official, or AO. This person compares the time recorded by the primary timing system with the time recorded by the backup systems. If the backup devices support the time recorded by the primary timing system, the AO certifies the primary time as official. But if the difference between the primary and any backup device is .30 second or greater, the Administrative Official's job gets complicated. He/she tries to determine the reason for the discrepancy – Did the swimmer miss the touchpad? Was it a soft touch? Did the touchpad (or button or watch) malfunction? Was the timer distracted or interfered with? The AO gathers as many facts as possible, and then determines the official time according to very specific rules found in the USA Swimming rulebook.

As you can see, the Moms and Dads serving as volunteer timers on deck are absolutely essential to the process of determining the official time for each and every swimmer in each and every heat.

Sometimes the official time is not the time seen on the scoreboard. This may be due to a missed touchpad, a soft touch, or a malfunction. Regardless, if your child has swum the prescribed distance legally, he/she will have an official time, which will be published in the posted results.

One caveat for meets that use the Meet Mobile app: Meet Mobile sometimes displays scoreboard times immediately, prior to review by the Administrative Official. Waiting a few minutes to view results will usually allow for corrected times that are official.