

# Pacific Swimming Age Group Program Review

## Preliminary Report

For presentation at the Pacific Swimming Board of Directors Meeting on September 23, 2015

This ad-hoc committee was formed by the Pacific Swimming Board of Directors to review the Age Group Program Time Standards and their effect on the Pacific Swimming Age Group Competitive Program. The Committee members are Don Heidary, Veronica Hernandez, Lehla Irwin, Todd Krohn (chair), Leo Lin, Jim Morefield, and Joey Sementelli. Pacific Swimming staff members Laurie Benton, Traci Benton, Diana Fetterman, and Annie Stein also contributed. The committee met via email and conference calls several times over the past few months.

Through much discussion, it was determined that any incremental changes to the Pacific Swimming Age Group Time Standards would not remedy what is wrong with the Pacific Swimming Age Group Program. A long history of incremental changes and short-term “band-aid” solutions have left us with a program that has lost its direction, grown unwieldy, and fails to provide quality competitive opportunities for many of our best and “second-level” age group swimmers. A full review was long overdue and any changes would need to be driven by data (available through the LSC Portal and SWIMS) or the general consensus of Pacific Swimming coaches.

The review started with a study of LSC’s of similar size and success or lack thereof. It continued with study of data provided through the LSC Portal and SWIMS. A coach’s survey was taken in August.

### Section 1 - Survey Review and Reaction

A comprehensive survey was put before all Pacific Swimming clubs in late July, and again the Tuesday following the 2016 LC Far Westerns Meet. As of August 14, just over 20 clubs responded (two coaches were unable to respond due to computer error). The survey was closed on August 20, ten days after the last response. Questions were posed for responses in a school grade system of Excellent, Good, Satisfactory, Needs Improvement, Fails, and No Opinion. There were also sections for coach comment/explanation on each major section of the survey.

The raw data for this survey is available at: <http://www.jotform.com/table/52236236319049>

#### ***Notable Responses:***

When asked to rate the Overall Experience in Pacific Swimming’s Age Group Program, not a single coach responded with an excellent rating, 17% responded with a good rating, and 75% deemed the program satisfactory or below (1.6 on the GPA scale).

When asked to rate the Time Standards in Pacific Swimming’s Age Group Program, a single coach responded with an excellent rating, 25% responded with a good rating, 35% responded with a needs improvement rating, and 17% deemed the current time standards a failure (1.6 on the GPA scale).

When asked specifically about using USA Swimming's National Motivation Time Standards as meet standards for Pacific meets, 40% answered affirmatively, while 60% wanted to separate time standards to control meet size.

### ***Meet Reviews:***

When asked to review specific meets, responses were sporadic. No single team attended all the LSC-level meets. A majority of coaches had negative responses for the Age Group Open Meets.

### ***General Comments:***

The complaints that came up most often were regarding time standards, meet length, lack of meets, and meets closing. There was no meaningful consensus on the success of Pacific Swimming, other than its growth.

## **Section 2 - National Motivational Time Standards vs. Meet Specific Time Standards**

The move from Pacific's old PC-B/PC-A/JO/FW times to the National Motivational Time Standards (B/BB/A/AA/AAA/AAAA) is a hot button issue with many coaches in Pacific Swimming.

There are two major complaints about Pacific's old time standards. The first is that the time standards were rarely updated and didn't reflect the growth in Pacific Swimming. This led to bloated meets that failed to provide quality competitive experiences. The second complaint is that the old time standards were not "keeping up with the progression of the NMTS." Both complaints are accurate, but the problem was not with having independent time standards. The problem was that there was no system in place to update them as necessary. After nearly 20 years of stagnation and neglect, the decision was made to abandon the PC-B and PC-A times, adopt the NMTS as motivational time standards, and over the course of many years, gradually move the JO and FW time standards towards the NMTS AA and AAA. For whatever reason, this was fast-tracked over one year (2014-2015), against the recommendation of the previous Time Standards Chair.

There are three major complaints about using the National Motivational Time Standards. The first is that new time standards were so much faster than the old, especially in some age groups. This came from both systems using similar tags. PC-B vs. NMTS B, PC-A vs. NMTS A, PC-JO vs. NMTS AA, etc. Other LSC's avoid this by using a different tag system for their independent time standards (for example, CA uses White, Red, and Blue). The second is that by using the NMTS for meet standards, several age groups were severely under-represented at our JO and FW level meets (especially 12&U boys and 10&U girls), while others were over-represented (13-14 girls and 13-14 boys). Data pulled from the LSC Portal shows that the percentage of Pacific 13-14's and 15-18's with AA or AAA times is significantly higher in number and percentage of population than the 10&Under girls and 11-12 and 10&Under boys. Additionally the FW cuts for 15&Overs were faster than many higher level Senior meets offered the same weekend at LCFW. The third complaint is that the NMTS aren't meant to monitor meet size. By

adopting these standards, Pacific cannot monitor meet size/duration. This is another “band-aid” solution that provides a poor solution, fails to provide proper competitive opportunities for all age groups, and does not provide a systematic solution to growth in the LSC.

Each system had its defenders as well. One coach expressed extreme frustration with the Age Group Committee for a number of years in regards to updating time standards to make the LSC-level meets better. Without clear direction from the Age Group Committee and the Board of Directors, it was impossible to improve the meets through time standard adjustment. Additionally, many changes were attempted after the meets were bid. These meets can be huge financial successes for the host clubs and many did want time standard adjustments “after the fact.” In recent years, the meets have become so cumbersome that only a few clubs bid on them and there is great stress in trying to run a successful meet that is destined to be overcrowded. The move to the NMTS took this decision out of the Age Group Committee’s hands and made the meets smaller. However, the JO/AGC meets will again be oversized in 2015-2016 as there is only 1 site for the March JO/AGC and 1 site for the July JO/AGC. Both of these meets will have all age groups in them. It seems the LSC doesn’t take this into account when setting the Age Group Schedule.

Some coaches noted that the NMTS were not meant to be used as time standards, and that it was “lazy” to adopt them as such. Although true on the first statement, the change was necessary because the times standards were not updated and the Age Group Committee failed for many years in two major ways: First, to properly address the growing size of the JO/AGC and FW meets and secondly, provide cooperation and direction to the Time Standards Chair in updating the time standards.

It proved extremely difficult to get entry information for past JO/AGC and FW meets. Although the feeling is that these meets have gotten too large, there is not data to definitely point to this. We had to rely on the coaches’ survey for this.

Nationally, there is a split among LSC’s which use the NMTS as meet standards. Of the 10 most populous LSC’s, two currently use these standards (Illinois and Pacific). Illinois is researching to move away from these in the next year or so.

There is a perception that the LSC has “gotten faster” with the adoption of the NMTS. Data pulled from the LSC shows that there is no significant change in improvement rates or number of AAA and AAAA level swimmers at any level. Another perception is that the LSC had placed more swimmers on National and National Junior teams since the adoption of the NMTS. No data pulled from the LSC Portal or SWIMS could substantiate or deny this claim.

***The recommendation is that Pacific Swimming use both the National Motivational Time Standards for a motivation program and its own independent time standards to control meet size at the JO/AGC and FW Meets:***

**National Motivational Time Standards:** Pacific should continue to use the NMTS as motivation and for meet and award divisions at Zone level Age Group Meets. It would be helpful to rename the Zone C/B/A+ meets as just “Age Group” meets. All Zone “Age Group” meets should provide awards in the following divisions: less than B, B, BB, and A+. All Age Group meets in Pacific Swimming should be

required to award A medals to swimmers achieving their first A time for each event in their current age group (one A medal for an A time, regardless of meet course).

**Pacific Independent Meet Time Standards:** Pacific should adopt meet-specific time standards for the JO/AGC and FW meets – there would be no lower level time standards published by Pacific except for the 8&Unders PC-B and PC-A. These time standards should be updated annually, for publication in September, to properly control the size of each meet. Time standards should expire in 18 months, as described in the Pacific Swimming Rules and Regulations. Additionally, it is critical that these time standards provide progression through the age groups.

## **Section 3 - Dysfunctional Senior Meet Schedule Trickle Down**

Years on dysfunction in the Senior Meet Schedule has contributed to bloated LSC-level Age Group meets. As the Senior Program has made some significant changes, and is continuing to improve, coaches should be able to properly accommodate their Senior swimmers. However, with significant changes to the Age Group Program, the Senior Program will need to place more meets on the schedule to accommodate specifically our 15&Over swimmers on or near certain weekends.

## **Section 4 - Population Growth over the next 15 years**

General population growth in the Pacific Swimming boundaries have varied significantly in the last 30 years, fluctuating between .9 and 3.4% annually. With data available for the last seven years, Pacific Swimming's year round registrations have grown from 12,957 in 2007 to 17,649 in 2015, an astounding 36% increase over the last 8 years. There were significant increases of 11% in 2009 and 8% in 2013, likely as a results of the '08 and '12 Olympic Games. It is probable that the LSC could the 20,000 year round athletes in the next ten years.

Additionally, there are more Season 1 (Sep. to Jan.) and Season 2 (Apr. to Aug.) athletes. These athletes must also be considered when time standards are set.

This incredible growth is one major reason for how bloated our LSC level Age Group meets have become. Any changes to Pacific's competitive program should consider this continued growth and plan to accommodate it over the next 15 years.

## **Section 5 - Targeted Age Groups in Pacific Swimming**

Because of the size of the LSC, and its probable continued growth, it is now necessary to focus the efforts of the LSC-level meets in the Age Group Program to the following age groups: 10&Under, 11-12, and 13-14. It will fall on the Senior Program to provide LSC-level meets for the 15-16 and 17-18 age groups. Additionally, with the size of the LSC, only the FW can realistically remain as a single venue meet. To properly accommodate the targeted age groups, the JO/AGC and JO/AGC-Max meets will have to run at multiple venues.

## Section 6 - Far Westerns

**The Far Western Meets should target the top age group swimmers in Pacific Swimming and the surrounding LSC's.** These meets should reach a proportionate number of 9-10's, 11-12's and 13-14's based on Pacific's athlete registration totals. This would require a pre-determined meet program (set by the AG Committee) and setting appropriate time standards for each age group and event. These meet should be **exclusive** in the effort to create a high quality competitive experience for the best age group swimmers in our LSC (**top down approach**), and should be scored to 16<sup>th</sup> place.

Meet	Age Groups	# of Days	Prelims (including distance events)	Finals Start	Finals Format	Target Date
2017 SC Far Westerns	10&U, 11-12, 13-14	3	9:00a to 1:30p	4:00p	2 heats	1st Saturday in April (avoiding Easter)
2017 LC Far Westerns	10&U, 11-12, 13-14, 15-16, 17-18	4	9:00a to 2:30p	5:00p	2 heats	1st Saturday in August

**Rationale for removing 15-18's from SC Far Westerns:** High School Swimming eligibility rules vary greatly in California, and the High School Swimming season is different in most states outside of California. Most California swimmers must be unattached at this point in the season and cannot score points for their team, thus vastly skewing the team scores at SCFW. This meet is traditionally not attractive to most out-of-state high school age swimmers because they have completed their short course seasons by early April. This meet is not traditionally attractive to Pacific 15-18's because of the timeline, time of year, presence of younger swimmers, and that many have participated in so many FW's that the meet has grown tiresome.

**Rationale for removing 15-18's from LC Far Westerns:** With the emergence of the Western Zone Senior Meet, the addition of the Futures Meet, and the presence of Junior Nationals/Nationals/US Open, any swimmer who currently qualifies for LCFW also qualifies for higher level Senior meets this same weekend. It is recommended that the 15-18's be included in the 2017 LC Far Westerns and be removed for the 2018 meet, following immediate review at the conclusion of the 2017 meet.

**Future Adjustment based on LSC population growth:** For the SC Far Westerns, the elimination of the 15-18's, the pre-determined meet format, and targeted timelines create a meet that is tailored to the top level 14&Unders in Pacific and the surrounding LSC's. For LC Far Westerns, the elimination of the 15-18's, the pre-determined meet format, and targeted timelines would create a meet that is tailored to the top level 14&Unders in Pacific and the surrounding LSC's. However, this may not be true with the inclusion of the 15-18's for the 2017 meet. Time Standards and for these meets should be tailored specifically to the meet format and should be adjusted annually to guarantee quality meets. The current 18 month qualification window should remain.

## Section 7 - Junior Olympics/Age Group Championship Meets

The Junior Olympics/Age Group Championship Meets should target the top age group swimmers in Pacific Swimming, reaching a proportionate number of 9&Unders, 10's, 11's, 12's, 13's, and 14's based on Pacific's athlete registration totals. This would require a pre-determined meet program (set by the AG Committee) and setting appropriate time standards for each age group and event. These meets should be *inclusive* in the effort to create a high quality competitive experience for a wide number of the age group swimmers in our LSC (*rising tide approach*), and should be scored to 16<sup>th</sup> place.

Meet	Age Groups	# of Sites	# of Days	Prelims (including distance events)	Finals Start	Finals Format	Target Date
December 2016	9&U, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14	2 @ 16 lanes (scy)	2.5 or 3	9:00a to 1:30p	4:00p	2 heats with traditional age group relays	2 Saturdays after Thanksgiving
March 2017	9&U, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14	2 @ 16 lanes (scy)	2.5 or 3	9:00a to 1:30p	4:00p	2 heats with traditional age group relays	3 Saturdays prior to SCFW
July 2017	9&U, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14	2 @ 8 lanes (lcm)	3	9:00a to 1:30p	4:00p	2 heats with traditional age group relays	3 Saturdays prior to LCFW

**Rationale for removing 15-18's from the March and July Meets:** Creating a high quality competitive experience for 14&Unders requires shortening these meets, which have been too long in recent years and can no longer accommodate growth. Senior meets near these same weekends must be added to the schedule to preserve this prelim/finals opportunity for the 15-18's (Pacific's version of the Clovis meets that are offered in early March and mid-July).

**Future Adjustment based on LSC population growth:** The elimination of the 15-18's, the pre-determined meet format, and targeted timelines create a group of meets that are tailored to a wide range of the age group swimmers in the LSC. Time Standards and for these meets should be tailored specifically to the meet format and should be adjusted annually to guarantee quality meets. The current 18 month qualification window should remain.

## Section 8 - 'JO/AGC Max' Stepping Stone Meets

The Stepping Stone Meets should target two groups: the 'next level down' age group swimmers in Pacific Swimming and the top-level swimmers in their weaker events, reaching a proportionate number of 9-10's, 11-12's, and 13-14's based on Pacific's athlete registration totals. This would require a pre-determined meet program. These meets should be **exclusive at the top end**, meaning a swimmer could not compete in an event that they qualify for the JO/AGC meets, in the effort to get JO/AGC level swimmers to swim their other events, and provide a high quality competitive experience meant to be a **'last chance' to qualify** for JO/AGC.

***These meets would be hosted by each Zone (not part of the Pacific bidding process) and could be adjusted locally to meet the needs of the swimmers in each Zone.***

Meet	Age Groups	# of Sites	# of Days	Timed Finals	Target Date
November	10&U, 11-12, 13-14 preferred (optional to include 15-18)	1 per Zone @ 16 lanes (scy)	2	9:00a to 2:00p	2 Saturdays prior to JO/AGC
Feb/March	10&U, 11-12, 13-14 preferred (optional to include 15-18)	1 per Zone @ 16 lanes (scy)	2	9:00a to 2:00p	2 Saturdays prior to JO/AGC
June	10&U, 11-12, 13-14 preferred (optional to include 15-18)	1 per Zone @ 8 lanes (lcm preferred)	2 or 3	9:00a to 2:00p	2 or 3 Saturdays prior to JO/AGC (based on July 4 <sup>th</sup> )

**Future Adjustment based on LSC population growth:** The possible elimination of the 15-18's, the pre-determined meet format, and targeted timelines create a group of meets that are tailored to a wide range of the age group swimmers in the LSC. These meets are based on the JO/AGC Meet Time Standards, which are subject to review on an annual basis.

## Section 9 - 10&Under Championship Meet

***(This section is still being considered and will be updated for the final report)***

The 10&Under Championship Meet is geographically popular to the South Bay. However, because of its location, current date at the start of the long course season and just after SCFW) it is not popular with many teams in other areas. It should remain on the meet schedule, and is currently being reviewed by the Age Group Committee.

## Section 10 - Age Group Open Meets

*(This section is still being considered and will be updated for the final report)*

Over the past 25 years, Pacific has gradually moved away from single or double class meets (there used to be many more C/B and A+ meets) to all-encompassing C/B/A+ Meets. As a result, the Age Group Open meets have become redundant and largely unattractive to many clubs. It is recommended that Pacific end the Age Group Open Meet system and adopt an 'Open Format Weekend' system.

### 'Open Format Weekend' System

Pacific will set aside the following weekends as 'Open Format Weekends.' This would be the opportunity for teams to host innovative meets outside the constraints of the LSC.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Weekend

Presidents' Day Weekend

Memorial Day Weekend

Labor Day Weekend

## Section 11 - General Meet Shortage

There is a shortage of age group meets in the LSC at Zone level. A major complaint from the coach's survey was that meets are filling too fast, and many swimmers are being turned away.

One problem is that a meet that reaches capacity is considered successful. From the view of the host team, financially, this is certainly true. For the health of our sport, this is a failure, and any number of swimmers who wished to compete on a given weekend are denied the opportunity. A schedule full of "successful" capped meets is a schedule full of lost opportunity for swimming in general.

Coaches reported the major causes of meet shortage: lack of pool space, protected weekends, zone priority entry, and a lack of qualified officials.

**Regarding pool space:** it is recommended that the LSC and the Zones research underused pools in the area and consider helping clubs that are not the primary users of these pools, or the LSC, or Zones, to host at these available pools. Clubs that do not currently host meets should be asked to contribute more workers to the LSC or Zone hosted events.

**Regarding protected weekends:** it is recommended that the only meets in the LSC that are allowed to be protected are Far Westerns and the JO/AGC meets. Additionally, there should be no zone limitations on a club wishing to host a meet outside of the zone schedule, except that it must be presented in writing to the zones at a time that each zone determines. If a meet fills, there should be no restrictions on another zone team opening up another meet on that weekend.

**Regarding zone priority entry:** no recommendation.

**Regarding a lack of qualified officials:** There needs to be an improved system to provide meet referees, admin referees, or head starters for age group dual meets. Some zones have so few qualified officials, that the officials are overworked and the zones/clubs cannot host enough meets to sustain or grow the local swimming population. Encouraging dual meets will do the most to alleviate the need for meets at the Zone level.

## **Section 12 - Other Suggestions**

The Pacific Age Group Program and Senior Program should be subject to annual review by the LSC Board, and include a coach's survey. Once these changes are instituted and in place, other aspects of the program should be reviewed. These aspects should include, but not be limited to: LSC All Star Travel Trips, Zone All Star Meet, and Camps.