

Club Scoring is a Perennial Debate



Photo courtesy of PWC Sports

> In May 2007, West Hollywood Aquatics Masters swimmer Tom Reudy posted this message to the USMS online Nationals discussion forum: “I wish someone could explain to me why the USMS Championship Committee changed club scoring from large, medium and small teams to clumping everyone in the same category.”

By the time a week and a half had passed, Reudy’s comment had elicited more than 50 replies, and the dialogue continued throughout the summer. Once again, the issue has arisen—whether to require small USMS club teams to compete head-to-head with large teams, or to allow the clubs to compete in categories based on their number of swimmers.

“What originally prompted me to post was the disillusionment of a large number of new swimmers on my team who were attending their first Nationals,” says Reudy, a former coach and one of the club’s senior members. “They couldn’t understand why our small club was competing in the same category as a team consisting of an entire state. They came to me for an explanation. It was my inability to

provide an answer that led me in search of others’ insight. After reading through the bulletin, it seems as though a large number of people had strong opinions on this topic, and were just waiting to express their frustrations.”

“People weren’t wishy-washy about this the way they might have been about more nebulous topics, things that weren’t going to happen immediately,” says USMS Secretary Meg Smath, “who attributes the issue to “a perception of unfairness.” She explains that swimmers in some of the larger LMSCs feel clubs composed of all the members of an LMSC have an unfair advantage when it comes to scoring at Nationals; they have an entire state to choose from. People in smaller LMSCs feel population density must be considered. If club membership were restricted arbitrarily, then they’d never have any teammates at Nationals.

Barry Fasbender, a past chair of the Championship Committee, developed an historical timeline (see sidebar). “All these decisions were made after extensive discussions by members of the Championship Committee and by the House of Delegates at annual USMS

conventions,” Fasbender says.

He adds, “No matter how you pick the divisions, it will always be unfair to the smaller teams in each division. If you try to put about the same number of teams in each of the divisions, you will end up with an even larger difference between the size of the largest and smallest teams in some of the divisions. However, many coaches use club scoring to motivate swimmers to go to Nationals—so it can create team spirit.”

“[The controversy] also comes down to the concept of what a club is,” Smath says. “The local clubs seem to feel that unless all your members swim in the same pool all the time, with the same coach, then you’re not a real club. The regional clubs are accustomed to working out separately, and getting together only at Nationals or other large meets, and they accept this arrangement as one that works for them.”

Reudy is hopeful: “Having heard that a draft of a new scoring system narrowly missed approval at the last convention, I’m optimistic that with another year’s debate, a new version will be drafted that satisfies the majority of teams, and will be implemented for Nationals in 2009.” <<<

CLUB SCORING HISTORY

>>> **1975-1978:** USMS begins compiling club scoring at Nationals.

1982-1985: USMS begins to give club awards to winners in three categories: men, women and combined.

>>> **1987:** Two divisions are added to each category based on the number of entrants: Division I for men and women with more than 15 swimmers entered, and combined men and women with more than 30 entrants; and Division II for less than the above numbers of entrants. Awards are given to the winners in each division of each category.

>>> **1988:** The cut-off numbers for divisions I and II entrants are raised to 16 and 32, respectively, and club awards are given to the top three teams in each division of each category.

>>> **1993:** After the meet entry deadline for each National Championship, the Championship Committee determines the numbers of entrants that constitute either a Division I (large) or Division II (small) team.

>>> **1995:** The number of divisions is expanded to large, medium and small.

>>> **2005:** All divisions are eliminated, and awards are given to the top 10 teams in each category, regardless of the number of entrants.

Barry Fasbender: “Up until 1988, the changes were primarily a result of the growing number of swimmers going to Nationals. The 1993 change resulted from some teams trying to game the system. Some swimmers were told to stay home or swim unattached so that a club could send its best swimmers and have the maximum number of swimmers allowed in a division.”