

Why are swimmers coming home from the pool with badges? **And what are time standards?**

What do Stingray Swim Club, Pennsbury, Mt. Kisco Boys Club, and the Bengal Tiger Acquatics have in common? They are all successfully using the ASCA (American Swim Coaches' Assoc.) Awards Programme. This internationally recognised badge programme with over 35,000 participants is based on the US National Age Group Time Standards (B-AAAA), available on the web at USS Swimming's Web site.

What is a time standard? Time standards in swimming are similar to the colour belt designation in karate. The faster the swimmer is in relation to their age group, the higher the time standard that they achieve. There are many different levels of time standards. Coloured badges 1" x 4" are available in all four strokes (Back, Breast, Fly, Free) plus Individual Medley as follows: C, B, BB, A, AA, AAA and AAAA.

All of these standards are used as a bench mark for your swimmers. Why are time standards so important? They give your swimmers something to shoot for. Sometimes, your swimmer will not win the race. And sometimes they will not get a ribbon/medal/trophy, but they will improve their time and may achieve a time standard that they have not had before. These are the awards that you should be encouraging your swimmers to shoot for.

A significant difference between swimming time standards and karate belts is that every two years swimmers endure the often-frustrating process of "ageing-up". This can be especially tough when a swimmer "ages-up" for the first time from the 10 & under age group to the 11-12. All the time standards they have achieved as 10 & unders expire and they have to re-earn the same standards against the tougher time standards of an older age group. Unfortunately a B badge looks exactly the same whatever age group it's earned in and this can cause confusion. Age Group Emblems were introduced to help swimmers display their awards clearly; 4" in diameter, they are available for ages: 10 & under, 11 - 12, 13 -14, 15 - 16, 17 - 18 and are awarded at the same time that a swimmer earns their first time standard in a new age group.

Official ASCA time standards are available for events from 50m to 1500m, in 25m pools (SC) and 50m pools (LC) and age groups from 10 & under to 17 – 18. To ensure that younger SSC members can participate fully in the programme, SSC uses time standards for 25m events derived by the coaches for 8 & unders. There is no age group emblem available for this age group. A very strong young swimmer may be earning their first 10 & under C times in 50m events at the same time as they are achieving B and BB times in 25m events in the 8 & under category. Again, it is important to keep them separate, the 8 & under awards will expire when the swimmer turns 9. These motivational times are often used as benchmarks for training groups or as qualifying standards for swim meets. Examples of this being the Burgdorff Invitational or Hall of Fame away meets, "A" level meets, for which swimmers must have achieved an "A" time in their age group.

Stingray Swim Club awards the time standard badges as they are earned during the year. The achievement of new time standards will be announced at training after each swim meet and posted by the coaches' office. Swimmers can collect their new badges from their coach.