

The 31st edition of the Commonwealth Games swim meet is going on right now. Unfortunately there is no pool playing host, no place to sit and watch, no races between evenly matched swimmers dashing to the wall.

Anyone who has been to a major swim meet knows they seem to last for days, but the Commonwealth Games meet really does, allowing its participants more than a month to swim events on their own and post times. The deadline is Nov. 30.

The current pandemic has derailed many sporting events, but Bud Swiger, a longtime swimmer volunteer with the Commonwealth Games swim meet, said the efforts of Games Director Amanda Mangum and volunteers has allowed the swim meet to go on as a virtual event.

In the virtual meet, swimmers can enter as many events as they want for \$5/event, after an initial charge of \$15 for the first event, then submit their times.

That's where Swiger takes over. Swiger is passionate about swimming and now has the time to devote to helping event like the Commonwealth Games. He has access to databases with the times of senior swimmers of all age groups, so he can compare times to make sure there are no shenanigans.

"It's an honor system," Swiger said of the meet's format of compiling submitted times. "One of the good things about the swimming community is that swimmers are a very trustworthy group."

Swiger does not anticipate any problems, but he will be comparing submitted times with a swimmer's history in competition.

"If someone suddenly takes a minute off their best time we'll have to question that," he said.

Not all indoor pools are open, but most YMCAs are back as part of Phase 3 of Virginia's re-opening plan.

"It was important to have this meet, even if it's just virtual," Swiger said. "Under the circumstances at least something has been done."

He said the sport of swimming has suffered from the closures brought on by COVID-19.

"This pandemic has just crushed competitive swimming on all levels," Swiger said. He knows about competition. Despite a self-deprecating claim that "I'm not very good," Swiger is a stalwart on the Virginia Masters Swim Team and has made it a habit to compete in about 20 events a year and a couple of open-water races.

The virtual event will lack some of the benefits of an organized meet. It's unlikely swimmers will be allowed to use starting blocks during open lap swim at the Y, but they're allowed by meet rules.

"You won't be around friends or meeting new people like real meets, which is sad. On the other had there's no need to drive too far and you won't be nervous leading up to the swim," Swiger said.

After 29 years of pounding the pavement as a distance runner who ran on the cross country team at UVA, Swiger developed asthma and had to give up running. He found swimming was a way to compete in an endurance event that did not tax his lungs as much.

“Swimming saved my life,” he said.

A retired dental surgeon, Swiger has competed in the Commonwealth Games swim meet for 20 years and loves the event. He has the time to promote his passion and help the sport by offering his time and talent as a meet administrator. It’s important to keep the effort going to swimming can come back strong in the post-pandemic world, whenever that gets here.

“It’s important to keep people involved and give them something to get hyped up about. That way when we get opened back up people will be ready to get back to it,” he said.