

HOW TO WRITE A PRESS RELEASE



Your primary tool for communicating with the media is a press release. Like most written documents, press releases have a definite style and rules. Here are some of those rules and their implications for you as a publicity person, and a sample press release which demonstrates news style at work.

- News stories are written in what is called an inverted pyramid style. Rather than starting with an introduction and building to a climax, a news story puts the most important information right at the beginning, in the first paragraph, or lead. Subsequent paragraphs add more detail and explain significance. The least relevant material is at the end. This allows editors to tailor the news they have available to fit their "news hole," or available space, by simply trimming from the bottom. You write your news release in this same fashion. Plan on spending most of your time on your lead.
- When you write your news, write it in news style, the fine points of which are explained below. That way, it'll need less editing and will be more likely to appear intact.
- While most news releases, including this one, are written with print publications in mind, you can also write a separate release for TV and radio. When you write a release for broadcast outlets, write it to be read on air.

Following is a sample news release. Although it talks about swimmers from your team winning events at a national meet, the principles are the same for a release about a local senior or age group meet, where the news might be swimmers qualifying for a regional or national championship meet. The links in the release will take you to explanatory footnotes which will help you understand the fine points of news style and writing a press release. At the end of the footnotes is a brief section on writing advance announcement news releases for the media.

*Be very careful when talking about time standards. Remember, virtually no one outside the immediate swimming community understands their significance. If you can't explain the significance of a time standard as part of your story, you're in danger of losing your audience (and that includes the editor who's reading your copy). Far better to say "qualified for the Far Western championship meet to be held next month in Concord" than to say "made his Q time." Not only does this explain, it makes the news you send out before and after Far Westerns far more relevant and attractive. Note how this is handled in the sample news release below.

-- Millbrae Marlins News --

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Jones, Martin win events at national meet

MILLBRAE, March 1, 2012 -- Tim Jones and Cindy Martin of the Millbrae Marlins Swim Team were event winners at the prestigious Speedo Champions Series California-Nevada Spring Championship held this past weekend in Bakersfield, California.

Jones, a Millbrae resident, won the boys 500 yard freestyle Friday night with a time of 4:20.89 and was third in the 1,000 yard freestyle yesterday with a time of 9:30.72. His winning time in the 500 yard freestyle qualified him for USA Swimming's Olympic Team selection meet to be held this July in Omaha.

Jones also swims for Millbrae High School and last year won the 500 and 1000 freestyle events at the Central Coast high school sectional championships held at Stanford University.

Martin, a Hillsborough resident, won the girls 200 yard breaststroke Saturday with a time of 2:17.11 after finishing fifth in the 100 yard breaststroke Thursday night.

Martin swims for Burlingame High School and was a finalist in the 100 yard breaststroke and the 200 yard individual medley at the girls Central Coast Championships last spring.

"Tim is the first Marlin swimmer ever to qualify for Olympic Trials," said Marlins head coach Mel Stafford. "Both he and Cindy had excellent meets and are on track for outstanding performances this summer at Olympic Trials."

Jones, his brother Mike, Rich Rodriguez of Millbrae, and Charlie Coleman of Burlingame also placed third in the boys' 400 yard freestyle relay Saturday night.

With more than 100 members from ages 6 to 19, the Marlins are the Millbrae area's largest competitive swim team. Affiliated with Pacific Swimming and USA Swimming, the Marlins train at City Pool and at Millbrae High School. For more information, call 987-6543.

COMMENTS

- Use your team letterhead with logo or put your team name on the top of the release in big type.
- Always include the name and contact information of someone who can provide more information or an interview if necessary.
- In news style, always use the last name only after the first mention of the name.
- If you're sending your news to a media outlet which serves a single community and your swimmers are all from that community, you probably don't need this bit of detail. However, if your news is going to a media outlet which serves a number of communities, it's important to include the hometown for everyone you name.
- After you've given the facts up top, explain their significance. Remember, your readers, and likely the reporter and editor at the media outlets in your town, don't know the significance of the times Jones swam. Explain it to them. (Remember the warning above!) Not only does this add detail to your story today, but it sets up the news release you'll be writing in June (and the feature story you'll be pitching, no doubt) when Jones is off to Trials!
- Tell a continuing story -- build threads to previous coverage. No doubt Jones got plenty of ink during the high school season (that's the Central Coast Championships referred to) -- make the connection, and banner it in your coverage. Whatever you have, build in those details -- make it easy for the writer to add depth and color to your story. And of course you've been keeping a separate file on Jones, with clippings and meet results, so that it's easy to go back and get these details.
- If your news release runs more than a single page, put "--more--" at the bottom of the initial page(s), and start any following page(s) with the number of the page and key words from your headline on the first page. And always put a commonly-understood "end" symbol like the three pound signs above at the bottom of your final page.
- Always double-space your copy when you're creating a hard-copy release.