



Information for Swimmers New to Competing in Galas

Attending your first open meet can seem pretty daunting, but the following information should help prepare you for your first event and alleviate some of those “first gala” nerves!

Types of Competitions

Each year our coaches decide which competitions (or galas) our swimmers will take part in, with different competitions geared towards different levels of swimming. Competitions usually fall into two broad categories:

- Galas where the club competes as a team against other clubs in leagues, such as Junior League and Arena League Galas where swimmers compete individually in licensed (Open) meets or championships
- Meets do not have to be licensed, but where they are, specific ASA rules must be followed. Licensed meets are graded Level 1 – 4.

When you look at the details for an open gala they often state that they are Level 3, Level 2 etc. The level indicates the standard of the meet, what the times can be used for in the future and what level of officials are used. Higher level galas are more competitive, with level 1 being the top galas. Your coach will let you know which galas you are eligible to compete in.

Team or League Galas

During the year there are some competitions where swimmers compete as part of a team to represent our club. These tend to be league events and follow a set programme each year, such as the Northumberland & Durham Junior League and the National Arena League.

Swimmers are selected by the coaches to take part in these events. If you have been selected as a member of a league team, you will be notified by your coach, and full details will also be provided on the club noticeboard, website and Facebook page.

Entering an Open (or other licensed) competition

Well in advance of the gala, a notice will be posted on the club notice board, the club website and Facebook page. To enter, you will need to register for the events in which you want to compete (your coach will be able to advise you on this). A gala entry form must be completed and handed to our Gala Administrator for each competition, which confirms all of the events you wish to enter. These can be downloaded from our website.

Parents and swimmers should be aware that sometimes entries may be rejected, largely due to over-subscription for the competition. If you have not been accepted for a particular race, you will be informed of this. Please speak to your coach if you have any questions. Please remember that mistakes can happen and we will do everything within our power to correct any mistakes made.

You will be expected to pay for each event that you have entered, normally between £4.50 - £6.00 per event. Payment must be made when submitting your gala entry form, both of which should be given to our Gala Administrator, who is usually available on Friday evenings.

The notice board, website and Facebook page will give you relevant information for the gala, including location, warm-up and start times. Please note that start time refers to the time the races actually start. Every swimmer should attend for warm-up which normally begins 1 hour before the advertised start time. If in doubt please ask!

Whilst we appreciate that there may be times when after entering an event, you can't attend (due to sickness or other unforeseen circumstances); we ask that coaches are notified AT LEAST TWO HOURS before the start of warm up, if a swimmer is unable to compete (so preferably the day before). This is because arrangements must be made to notify officials that the swimmer is withdrawing from an event(s).

Therefore, please could parents make sure that they have contact details for their coach, in the event such a situation should arise.

Arriving at the venue

On arrival at the venue, all swimmers are usually allowed straight into the changing rooms, although parents please take note that spectators must queue to pay their entry and programme fee (so make sure you are prepared for the weather , there's nothing worse than queueing in the rain!!).

It's also often very hot and humid at the pools, so our advice would be to take plenty to drink. It might also help to know that clubs use 'home competitions' as a means of raising funds for their club, so be prepared for a raffle or two & other fundraisers!!

What to expect on the day

Warm-up is held before every session and is usually divided into separate age groups and sexes. Please listen to the announcements or ask your coach or an experienced swimmer. The Head Coach insists that all our swimmers participate in the warm-up. The actual races may not be held for some considerable time after warm-up and swimmers are therefore required to take both warm-up swimwear and racing swimwear to enable them to change into dry gear once warm-up is complete.

They should also take a tracksuit, sweatshirt, t-shirts or other suitable clothing to ensure they remain warm prior to swimming. Suitable footwear (trainers or flip flops) are also required around the poolside to prevent heat loss and injury. Club clothing should be worn at all times.

The Coach on poolside will normally have a programme, so you need to be aware of when your race is likely to be swum. The Coach will normally want to talk to you about the race, so he will inform you when it is time to go to the marshalling area. Don't be afraid to ask another swimmer if you are unsure!

Check List

Before leaving the house check you packed:

- Club T-Shirts / Club Tracksuit
- Swimming gear & towels (usually two per session)
- Club swimming hat
- Goggles (and a spare set)
- Drinks (water or juice) & a packed lunch
- Poolside clothing including pool shoes

Warm-Up

Be sure you arrive at the advertised time for Warm-Up when you will need to:

- Change into warm-up swimming costume
- Complete warm-up when advised by your coach
- Change into dry swimwear

Before Your Race

- Check in with your Coach before going to marshalling area
- Go behind blocks, and remove warm clothing
- Listen to the instructions from the Officials and starter then...
- Win your race!

When you have finished your event

Make sure you collect your clothing from behind the blocks, and go straight to your coach for a debrief. After you have completed a swim down, get dried, keep warm and await your next race.

Useful Info/Top Tips for parents

PBs

For those that don't know, PB means 'Personal Best Time'. There is a bit of an obsession with PBs, and you'll soon be using the term regularly if your child is a keen competitive swimmer!! Be warned!!

The ASA hold a database of all official PBs recorded at licensed meets. This is usually updated a few days after an event. You can access this database via our website on the "Links" page.

However, it's important to realise that times are only one part of swimmer's performance, there are many ways to measure your progress and performance, which your coach will discuss and feedback to you both at competitions and during training sessions.

Disqualifications (or DQs)

Occasionally, a swimmer may get disqualified from their race. Don't worry!! – this is nothing to get disheartened about, as believe us it happens to everyone at some time!!

The important thing is to learn where you might have gone wrong and your coach will help you with this.

There are several "technical" reasons for disqualification, which could be related to your start, turn or your stroke itself. You can find a full list of the reasons for disqualification on our "Guide to Swimming" page.

Team Kit

We expect swimmers to attend competitions in team kit. T-shirts, Hoodies & hats can be purchased from our Club Shop. Our website will tell you who to contact to order club items.

Facilities at venues

These can vary greatly, some pools have fantastic facilities; great parking, on site food vendors etc. but others may not offer quite as much.

Our top tip would be that if you are travelling to a new venue, speak to other parents to see what's available, and arrive in plenty time to avoid any last minute parking panic!

Also we suggest taking plenty to eat and drink, as some venues only offer expensive vending machines (which have even been known to be out of order!) So better to go prepared!

So all that is left to say is that we warmly welcome you to the world of competitive swimming, and hope that this has given you a bit of an insight into what you can expect.

Happy Competing & Good Luck!