



ENTERING YOUR FIRST OPEN MEET

What is a swimming 'open meet' or gala?

Licensed Open Meet is the term given to an officially recognised swimming competition organised under Swim England rules, to defined standards of organisation and refereeing. They form the structure of competitive swimming and are organised into different levels: 1, 2, 3 & 4 (4 being the lowest level) and enable swimmers to gain qualifying times for County, Regional and eventually National Championships. These meets are run by Clubs and volunteer parents like you.

Why enter an Open Meet?

- To compete
- To see how much progress, you have made
- To put into practice what you have been learning in training
- To learn from watching more experienced swimmers
- To improve your Personal Best times (PBs) or gain some new times
- To achieve qualifying times for other galas
- To meet new people
- To have fun

How do I know if I am ready to take part?

If you are in Bobcats Micro League Squad or higher and are 9 years old or older, then you are eligible to take part in an Open Meet. Speak to your child's coach or a committee member if they would like to start competing and they will point you in the right direction.

If an Open meet is coming up that your child is eligible for, you will receive an email from one of the coaching team or the club competition secretary.

How many Club Members participate?

This varies according to the level of meet and the time of year but generally there are quite a few swimmers, which creates a great atmosphere for cheering on other swimmers in their races.

Entry Procedures and Costs

Entry details will be sent out approximately 6 weeks before the competition but may be earlier or later depending on the level of competition and how quickly entries need to be returned.

You will need to complete the Bobcats entry form and return the appropriate entry fees via BACS, details of how to do this will be included in the information you receive.

It usually costs between £5 and £7 per race.

Most Open Meets have set times that need to be achieved for each event and these vary between meets, so please read the meet details carefully and if you are unsure ask your child's coach, the competition secretary, or any experienced swimming parent. If there are several sessions within one



swimming meet, you do not need to do all the sessions unless you want to and can leave when you have swum all your races.

If you are not sure which events your child should enter, please speak with their coach.

Going to an Open Meet

Going to your first open meet can be quite a daunting experience. If you are new to competing, the following information should help you prepare.

- Most open meets start early in the morning; you will need to be prepared to arrive for 7:30am if swimming in the morning session. Depending on how many races / sessions you have entered it is possible that you may be at the pool until 5pm.
- Make sure you allow plenty of time to travel to the venue and find somewhere to park. The pool address will be on the email from the Competition Secretary but if in doubt either check the website of the Club hosting the meet or email the Competition Secretary. There are usually between 200-300 swimmers competing in each session so parking can sometimes be a problem.
- Warm-ups usually start one hour before racing starts, it is vital that swimmers can get a warm-up – both to prepare their body but also to familiarise themselves with the pool and starting blocks etc. There is a warm-up before every session and there are usually two sessions per day with a break for lunch in between.
- Swimmers should aim to arrive at the pool approximately 30 mins before the warm-up to meet with the coach and/or team manager, they will be able to answer any questions you may have and show your child where to get changed. As competitions can last a long time, it is important for the team to arrive early to find space to sit on poolside – arriving late can mean less space.
- Many swimmers like to arrive at galas wearing Club Kit, this can be ordered at: <https://www.mailsports.co.uk/clubs/bobcats-swim-squad>, using the code BBCSCFINIS to receive a 15% discount. If you are wishing to purchase kit, please allow plenty of time as they can take up to a month to arrive. Don't worry if you don't have club kit, anything in club colours (Black and White) will be fine. T-shirts and shorts can get wet during the competition so swimmers will need separate clothes to go home.
- A coach will be present to supervise swimmers at the event, this may not be your squad's coach.
- Most changing rooms have lockers that can be used if you have the correct coin. You can leave some belongings in the locker but take a small bag with you on to the poolside containing things you will need (see checklist below.)

Checklist

- Club t-shirts/shorts/hoodies (if you have them)
- Swimming jammers/costume (and a spare)
- Towels – one for on poolside
- Club shirt or other t-shirt to wear on poolside between races
- Club swimming cap (and a spare one)



- Goggles (and a spare set)
- Drinks (water or squash) and healthy snacks for between events
- Lunch (if staying for more than one session)
- Poolside shoes (flip flops/sliders)

Spectators

- Spectators including parents must queue to enter the viewing area and pay their entry fee and programme fee (if wanted) – parents will not be allowed on poolside.

During the Competition

- Warm up is held before each session and is usually for separate age groups, both girls and boys. Follow the warm-up instructions carefully.
- The coach will have a programme of events and swimmers will be made aware of their event(s) and told when they need to get ready.
- The coach will talk to each swimmer before their race and advise when to go to the marshalling area. After each race swimmers should go directly to talk to their coach who will give them feedback on their swim. If swimmers need to leave the poolside, they should ask permission from the coach before doing so whether it is in the middle of a session or after they have swum all their races.
- There will be several heats within the same event, and these are organised based on times already achieved. The swimmers who have no times (NT) will be first to race, the last heat contains the swimmers with the fastest times. This means there will be different age ranges racing in the same heat so even if you win your heat, you may not win your age group as there may be others within your age group in other heats, both quicker and slower.
- Results from each event are usually put up in an area outside the pool so you can check your times and where you came in your age group a short while after the event. If you have won a medal these can be collected straight away. Many meets also now use the meet mobile app available on smart phones this can also give you the time and placing.
- Swimmers are expected to stay in the water at the end of their lane, until the race has finished, and they are told to leave the pool.
- DO NOT BE AFRAID TO ASK THE COACH OR AN EXPERIENCED SWIMMER IF YOU ARE UNSURE!

Parents

When you arrive at a swim competition you will usually be asked for payment to enter and watch the races plus a programme charge. It is advisable to also attend a competition with provisions for the day - some pools have very limited eating and drinking facilities, so it is advisable to go prepared. You should be prepared for a long and usually very hot wait! Often a session can be between 2-3 hours, during which your child may only be in the water for a couple of minutes!

You may be allowed to use a camera at the competition; however, you will be expected to declare your intention to carry out any form of photography when you enter the pool and to provide your name and address. This includes using mobile phones with in-built cameras.



Supporting your child

It is best to stay at the pool to support your child. Be prepared for your child not to swim their best. Attending competitions is all part of the development process and is a learning experience for your child as well as providing opportunities to qualify for future competitions. They can come and find you during an Open Meet if necessary (and to stock up on food/drink) but it is good for team spirit to support their friends in their events as a team on poolside.

Supporting your child through a disappointing swim is as important as when they swim well.

Problems at competitions

Goggles break and caps tear! - Always carry spare goggles and caps, as they may be needed at the last minute.

Disqualification - occurs if the swimmer does anything illegal e.g. incorrect turns, incorrect kick/arm action, false starts etc. Don't worry, despite all the training this happens to everyone at some point, even the most experienced swimmers!

If a problem occurs during a race, such as losing goggles, then it is best to continue swimming the race. However, clearly problems such as asthma attacks may require the swimmer to stop immediately.

NOT EVERYTHING CAN BE COVERED IN ONE INFORMATION DOCUMENT SO IF YOU ARE NOT SURE ON ANYTHING, ASK ANY PARENTS/COMMITTEE MEMBERS/COACHES/OLDER SWIMMERS WHO WILL BE MORE THAN HAPPY TO HELP AS WE WERE ALL NEW ONCE, BOTH SWIMMERS AND PARENTS!