

# ENTERING COMPETITIONS

## 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 backbone of competitive swimming, are organised into different levels: 1, 2, 3 & 4 (the entry 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 see how much progress you have made
- To put into practice what you have been learning in training
- To improve your Personal Best times (PBs) or gain some new times if you haven’t raced that particular event before
- To achieve qualifying times for other galas
- To compete
- To learn from watching more experienced swimmers
- To represent BBF in League competitions
- To meet new people
- To have fun
- To win!

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

If you are in Mini Fins 4 or higher and are 9 years old or older then you are eligible to take part in an Open Meet. Occasionally meets are available for 8 year olds but you will get an email to let you know if there is one coming up. Speak to your Coach or our Open Meets Coordinator if you would like to begin competing or chat to or email a Committee Member for advice and they will point you in the right direction. If an Open meet is coming up that you are eligible for you will get an email from our Open Meets Coordinator.

## 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

An email will come through usually from our Squads coordinator with information forwarded from our Open Meets coordinator ([bbfopenmeets@gmail.com](mailto:bbfopenmeets@gmail.com)) about a ‘meet’ that is coming up in the near future. Fill in the entry form and give this, along with a cheque (payable to Bicester Blue Fins) or cash for the correct number of races (usually between £4 and £6 per race) entered to the Open Meets coordinator or place in an envelope and put into the letterbox up on the balcony at Bicester Pool. If you need advice on which races you should enter, ask your Coach. Most Open Meets have set times that have to be achieved for each event and these vary between meets so please read the meet details carefully and if you are unsure ask our Open Meets Coordinator or any experienced parent or Coach. 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 but please check with the Coach before leaving.

## How do I find out exactly where a meet is?

Once you have received the email informing you there is an Open Meet, you can look at the hosting clubs website where there will be full details.

## Going to a Gala

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

- Make sure you allow plenty of time to travel to the gala and find somewhere to park. The details of where the pool is will be on the email from the Open Meets Coordinator but if in doubt either check the website of the Club hosting the meet or email the Open Meets Coordinator. There are often several clubs competing in the same gala so parking can sometimes be a problem. Warm-ups usually start one hour before the gala start time and sometimes warm-up time is only be announced the night before so keep an eye out for updates either via email/bbf website/twitter. There is a warm-up before every session and there are often three sessions in a day with a short break in between. Swimmers should aim to arrive at the pool approximately 30 mins before warm up or in time to sign in whichever is earlier (the information about the gala will state the sign in time).
- On arrival, at the competition venue, swimmers must ‘sign in’ by a certain time, which will be in the details of the competition. There is usually a sign in table as you enter the venue. If a swimmer doesn’t sign in on time, they will not be able to compete. If there are several sessions within a day or weekend, there will be a separate sign in for every session.
- Many swimmers like to arrive at galas in the Club tracksuit, onesie or Club shirt, these need to be ordered from the Swim Shop on the balcony in plenty of time as they are named so take a few weeks to arrive. Wearing a Club t-shirt on poolside makes you feel part of the team and makes it easier for the Coaches to find their swimmers. However these shirts may get wet so swimmers will need separate clothes to go home.
- Swimmers are normally allowed in to the changing rooms on arrival.
- 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.)
- Having registered, swimmers get changed and wait on poolside along with the other BBF swimmers, ready for warm-up. A coach will be present to supervise the event, but he or she may not be your squad’s coach.
- 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.
- Spectators including parents must queue to enter the viewing area and pay their entry fee and programme fee - they will not be allowed on poolside.

### **During the Gala**

- 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 (also known as the whipping 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 continuing on to the last heat with 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.
- DO NOT BE AFRAID TO ASK THE COACH OR AN EXPERIENCED SWIMMER IF YOU ARE UNSURE!

## **Checklist**

- Club t-shirts/tracksuits/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 hat (and a spare one)
- Goggles (and a spare set)
- Drinks (water or squash) and sensible snacks for between events
- Lunch or tea if there are more than one session
- Poolside shoes (crocs or flip flops)

## **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 galas, 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 achieve qualifying times etc. 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. They need to ask their Coach if they wish to leave poolside so as to avoid missing their events. Supporting your child through a disappointing swim is as important as when they swim well. Obviously any areas of concern should be discussed with your child's coach by arranging a meeting.

**Meet Mobile** is an app available (there is a charge) that enables parents to look up their children's times as soon as they have been uploaded by the meet organisers which is usually fairly quickly after the event has finished. A lot of Clubs now use Meet Mobile for their Open Meets but not all. Just download the app and enter the name of the meet you are at. This is also useful for grandparents/friends/family to follow your child's competition from afar!

## **Problems at Galas**

Late registration - speak to the coach immediately.

Goggles break and hats tear! - Always carry spare goggles and hats, 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 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 NOVICES ONCE, BOTH SWIMMERS AND PARENTS!