



Guide To Competitive Swimming





Introduction

This guide has been put together to help you and your swimmer understand and prepare for the various swimming events they will be involved in. Starting out can be a daunting experience and this guide is intended to explain how everything works and to make it an easier process.

The ratio between competing and training is important. More information on this can be found in a booklet produced by ASA entitled;

‘Long-term Athlete Development related to the journey through swimming’.

General advice

Swimmers who have not yet reached their ninth birthday are only (under current ASA rules) able to participate in internal events. Some swimmers may be able to swim in the Octopus League galas when they are 8, depending on their birthday. As a general rule, young swimmers start by competing over 25m and 50m distances, the 200m and 100m IM distances are then added.

The club will usually try to put your swimmer in a relay race for their first experience of a Gala competition - this helps to control the inevitable 'first race nerves'.

For most events there are no heats or finals, just races (Heat Declared Winners or HDW). Swimmers race against swimmers with similar qualifying times but not necessarily the same age. The times are then recorded for each race and the winner is the quickest swimmer in that age group. Disqualifications are inevitable, especially for the younger swimmer and with the more technical strokes and turns. Your swimmer will be disappointed but should be praised for their race effort. In the long run it is better for them to be disqualified in the early stages of their career, they will quickly learn to be competitive. They will have plenty of other opportunities to race again! More information on ‘How to Avoid a DQ’ is also visible on the South Croydon SC website.

Swimming Events

See the Gala Page of the **South Croydon SC** web site for the gala programme. The number and types of meets for the season are agreed by the coaches. Meets are selected to give a good range of events throughout the year with a range of levels available around the dates of the Surrey County, London Regional and National Championships.

1. Internal. These will only have South Croydon SC swimmers attend and notification will be posted on the website i.e. South Croydon SC Club Championships. (Level 4)

2. Open or Graded Meets. These are hosted by other swimming clubs and will include swimmers from many clubs. Most swimmers start at Level 4 galas with the highest level being Level 1.



3. League Galas. These are team events. Swimmers will be selected by the club to swim in these and will be told which event they will be swimming once they have arrived poolside. i.e. Octopus League and the prestigious Arena League

4. Championships. These include events such as the Surrey County Championships, London Regional Championships and National Championships. These all have specific qualifying times which can be found on the relevant web sites.

Internal Events

‘Licenced’ Club Championships galas are organised and run by South Croydon SC. A number of Club Championship galas with different events are held throughout the year, generally on Saturday evenings at Whitgift Pool. The Club Championships are licensed by the London Swimming Association (as a Level 4 meet) and comply with Amateur Swimming Association (A.S.A.) and FINA rules.

All swimmers at South Croydon SC are invited to swim at these galas provided they are ASA Category 2 (competitive) registered. The only entry condition for these galas is that you are a paid up member of South Croydon Swimming Club. There is one exception to this, the long distance events (Jan gala) which are more selective due to the limited pool time available. Please ask your squad coach if you are unsure. The races are within age groups, across squads, which enable coaches to compare times across the club. Results are posted after all ages have swam the stroke/distance. There are awards.

Ages

Ages can vary between galas, sometimes its age on the last date of the gala meet, other times at the end of the year. For Club Championships the club uses year of birth or ‘age as of 31st December’ which means the age your swimmer will be at the end of that year, not the age they are on the day of the event. Sometimes you gain and sometimes you lose. Often age groups are doubled so awards are given to 10,11yrs / 12,13 yrs etc so if you are a young 12 year old for example, your chances of winning are more limited. Whilst medals are great and excellent confidence boosters, as your child progresses you will find this becomes less important and faster times and ‘pb’s’ (personal bests) become a much more important goal.



Open or Graded Meets

An open meet is very different from other events in several ways, and therefore requires a little more preparation. These meets take place over a longer period of time than other events, often a whole day or weekend rather than a single evening. Open meets are generally “age on the day”, so the age your swimmer will be on the last day of the event. Any swimmer who is age 9 or older can enter open meets provided they meet the entry qualification or consideration time for their age.

Levels of Galas: These levels are standards set by the ASA. Open meets are licensed according to the purpose of their competition. They are graded levels 1 to 4.

Level 3 and 4 are mainly for swimmers around or below county level. Entry times are set at an appropriate level. In some galas it is possible to enter with no recorded time.

Level 2 and 1 are for swimmers at or above county level. Entry times are faster than for level 3 meets and times may need to have been achieved within a certain time period and verified by the ASA.

There are different ‘levels’ of gala and each have their own entry criteria. The objective when swimming at any gala is to either swim faster in that event than you have done previously and achieve a personal best time or try out different race strategy for a particular event.

Open Meets

These are galas organised and run by other swimming clubs and are held at various locations across the country. Generally, you must be at least 9 years of age on the date of the gala to compete at open meets. These meets are generally licensed as level 1, 2 or 3 meets. The level attributed to the meet is indicative of the entry criteria associated with it. Level 1 is the highest level where only the fastest swimmers are eligible to enter. An entry fee will be charged to cover costs such as pool hire, equipment and medals etc.

County Championships



The focus of many South Croydon SC’s swimmers is to meet the entry criteria for the Surrey Age Group Championships. These are held each year, typically during February. Age is at 31 December and minimum age of 10 years to compete.

The qualifying times do vary every year although not greatly so the previous year’s qualifying times can be taken as a rough guide. Unlike most open meets, only times attained after a certain date in the year (for 2013 the date was 23rd March 2013) are able to be used and these times must have been

achieved at a licensed meet, levels 1-4 prior to the closing date for entries.



Regional Championships

Once you have achieved county level, the next level of competition is the regional championships and South Croydon falls within the London Region. The regional championships are held every year, typically in May or June. You must be at least 11 yrs old by 31 December in the year of competition to be able to compete. As for the county championships the qualifying times do vary every year although generally not greatly so the previously year's qualifying times can again be taken as a rough entry guide. Once again, only times attained after a certain date in the year (approx October) are able to be used and these times must have been achieved at a licensed meet, level 3 or above which excludes times gained at club championships but includes times gained at county championships.

National Championships



At the top of the swimming pyramid are the National Championships. These are held each year, typically in July or August. You must be at least 12 years of age on the 31 December 2015 to compete. The qualifying times do vary every year, generally not greatly so the previous year's qualifying times can be taken as a guide. Only times attained after a certain date in the year (approx October) are able to be used and these times must have been achieved at a licensed meet at level 2 or above which include county and regional championships.

Gala Programme

During the course of the year the coaches choose which open meets the Club wishes swimmers to attend based upon the appropriate level of competition. The choice of open meet may be different for different squads. Details of the meet, such as the entry form and qualification times, are generally put on the web site and sent out via email. Please complete and return entries with payments (cheque or make payment on line) to your squad rep or competition secretary as soon as you can as late entries will not be accepted by the host clubs. These details can also usually be found on the host clubs web site. Please note that we do are unable to accept cash payments.

How to Enter

Our Gala Secretary will co-ordinate the entries for South Croydon swimming club. Entries will be sent out via email with details of the entry deadline, qualification times (upper or lower) along with the promoters conditions and programme of events (**Please read carefully**) It is sometimes possible for us to produce an eligibility report

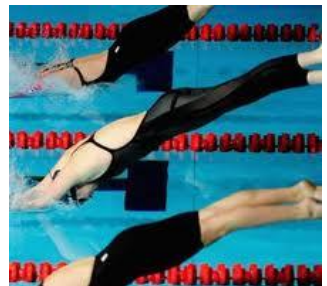


from the database to identify who in the club meets the entry criteria (new for 2012). This is possible because we maintain a database of swimmers' times achieved at licensed galas and those galas that the club attends, including the Club Championships. However, if you have times from any other outside event it is possible that we won't have them recorded in the database and may not therefore identify you as being eligible for the event. This highlights the importance of keeping your own record of PB's with a note of when and where they were achieved. If there is an open meet which is not on the fixtures list but you wish to enter you should first discuss this with your child's coach but essentially you are free to enter any open meet. Any club running an open meet will publish details on their own web sites, with links to the documentation and forms you will require. **Do please remember** at meets not supported by SCSC there will be no official coach poolside, and this can be particularly daunting for a young child. **If however you are attending a gala that we do not have a representative please ask the Gala Secretary for a form as there is a small fee charged by the South Croydon SC to process the administration of times for these events.**

If you are not sure which events to enter, speak to your swimmer's coach for advice or ask the gala or club secretary. In general, especially for inexperienced swimmers, it is advisable to carefully select swims, try to avoid cramming too much in, long gaps between swims and an overall long day. Please *clearly* mark which events you want to enter & return the form to the gala secretary or squad rep with the correct amount of money. It is advisable to return the form before the closing date rather than on the very last day, so that any queries can be sorted out early. If you miss the closing date your swimmer will not be able to participate.

Acceptance

Even though your swimmer may be inside the consideration or qualifying time, their entry may not be accepted if the host club receives too many entrants. When this happens the host club will reject entries starting with those nearest to the cut off time published in the gala conditions. Refunds will be given via South Croydon SC for all rejected entries. You will be informed via email and refund arranged. Please be patient as it does take a while for the refund cheques to come through after a meet.



Sign In For Galas

Most meets require swimmers to sign against their name (sign in) for each event. This is normally required by a certain time, usually before the warm up for each session but be aware some meets have a queue to sign in. The signing in sheets are usually found by the changing rooms and have one sheet per event, printed with the entry names in alphabetical order. **If you are in more than one event in a session make sure you sign in for all events in that session. Often sheets for later sessions come out during the earlier session so if your swimmer has an event in a later session they can sign in early and avoid the pre warm up rush. It is very important to remember that it is the swimmer's responsibility to sign-in and NOT the coaches. A coach may be overseeing the next warm up and will not be able to check the sign in sheets!**



Long course and short course

Short course events are swam in a 25m pools (such as Whitgift) and long course swam in 50m pools (such as Crystal Palace). As there are very few long course pools in this country most galas will be short course and often you can use a converted short course time to enter a long course meet. It is a good practice to enter a long course meet because it is quite a different experience for swimmers and can take a while to get used to the length of the pool.

Getting Involved

At any meet you attend across all levels every gala official is a volunteer. The majority of officials have children swimming or have seen their children through competitive swimming but still wish to be involved. They give a huge amount of their time and energy to make galas happen, one of the best ways to understand how competitive swimming works is to become involved yourself. You can start at club level by volunteering to timekeep at club championships. There are courses which you can take via the club which will introduce you to judging and becoming an official. All the people who run the club at present are parents who volunteer.

If you would like to become involved with the administration of the club then you could volunteer to shadow a member of the committee or volunteer for a vacant role. We would like to remind all members that it is only because of the volunteers that all our children have an opportunity to swim at South Croydon. These volunteers give up their free time to help the club progress and always act in the Club's best interest. So please do treat all volunteers with respect and promote the happy team atmosphere of South Croydon.

How should we prepare?

In the week before a meet, and at the end of each day of the meet, ensure that your swimmer refuels on top quality athletes food containing complex carbohydrates. They should also be drinking plenty of fluids, to ensure their body cells are fully hydrated. It can add to the nerves before a race if a swimmer is worrying about a new pair of goggles that have just been bought because their usual ones broke. Where possible swimmers should refrain from trying out new costumes or goggles for the first time in a race. It is best for new items to be "experienced" during a training session so that any problems can be resolved ahead of the competition





What do I need to do?

You have to make sure that your swimmer gets an early night before a gala and arrives at the pool in plenty of time. In the rush to get your swimmer ready it can be easy to forget your own needs, so don't forget to pack items for yourself. You might want to bring a comfortable cushion (some venues have very hard spectator seating), something to read, a pen or pencil to mark up your programme, and a separate picnic with plenty to drink. Some parents also like to bring a stopwatch but this is not essential as many venues have electronic time board and results will be printed and displayed at the venue during the sessions. It is worth noting your swimmers times for each event as DQ's (disqualifications) will not get an official time recorded but praise for a PB, even with a disqualification will help the disappointment. Then as a parent you have to be seen to be cheering, taking photos (remember spare batteries, memory sticks or film and sign photo permission form), and worrying!



What should the swimmer eat and drink?



On the day of the meet your swimmer may be on poolside for the whole day, so they need to be kept well stocked with small, easily digestible snacks, rather than having large meals. It is just as important to stay well hydrated, so provide plenty of fluids and encourage your swimmer to sip often at their drink during the day.

Although some venues have excellent catering facilities it is best not to rely on them, so bring a selection of food to keep your swimmer in top form throughout the day. For younger swimmers it is best to hand the food to them in small doses to avoid them eating it all within the first hour!

To keep perishable food fresh we suggest you use a cool bag with an ice pack. The author and nutritionist Anita Bean has written many books regarding nutrition and exercise and for more information please visit her website www.anitabean.co.uk where you can find recipes and ideas.

Food suggestions

Complex carbohydrates for "grazing" throughout the day, e.g. small portions of:

- Pasta/Rice salad
- Muffins (sweet or savoury)
- Bread, Pitta bread, Bagels
- Pizza (but be careful of fatty toppings)
- Rice cakes
- Breakfast cereals or Cereal bars
- Bananas
- Popcorn

Jacket potatoes are also suitable if available at the venue's catering outlet. **No Sweets**

Drinks suggestions

- Water
- Sports drinks
- Weak squash

Note: Fizzy drinks & glass containers of any kind are banned.



Before you Go

Plenty of sleep and a healthy diet is essential for any athlete and establishing this as part of the every day routine is easier than trying the night before. Make sure you child's bag is packed and try to get them to keep everything in the bag on poolside. Label all clothing and water bottles.

What must I pack in my swimming bag?

2 x swimming goggles, 2 x swimming hats, 1 towel (each session). You may find it useful to purchase a swimmer's chamois. It allows the swimmer to dry off most of the moisture without soaking their usual towel, and saves your laundry basket. Club polo shirt, shorts, tracksuit bottoms, pool shoes, drinks in plastic bottles, snacks for between races. All swimmers should wear a club swimming hat for races and have a spare available. Bag for wet clothing.



What should I wear to the gala?

**Club top – polo shirt /T-shirt / hooded top
tracksuit bottoms / shorts or similar / trainers / crocs.**

What should I take poolside?

Swimming Bag as this is where ALL of your possessions should be kept at all times. Any electronic games should only be played during session breaks. ipods and mobile phones (no cameras) are allowed but please ensure mobiles are set to silent at all times. These are the responsibility of the swimmer NOT the Team Manager or Coach.

On the day of the Open meet

Warm up is 30 minutes to an hour before the event start and is usually separate for boys / girls and, depending on numbers, the older swimmers will often warm up after the younger ones. There is no diving during the initial warm up. Towards the end of each warm up session a sprint lane is normally announced where diving is permitted (swimmers must have competitive dive status). Listen for the announcement, some lanes will be dedicated as sprint lanes where swimmers can dive in and sprint one length, getting out at the other end and walking back. As the swimmers progress each swimmers will know their own 'race preparation warm up'. The Coach may give your swimmer advice on how much warm up to do and what thing to concentrate on depending on the event they are swimming that day. When the meet starts, announcements will be made calling each event in turn. When an announcement is made for the relevant event your swimmer will be called by the Coach for a last minute talk and then sent down to the marshalling or "whipping" area.

The younger ones especially will want to wave to you as they go down to the Whipping area and at this point you start to panic they haven't got their goggles, hat etc. In the Whipping area your swimmer should put their goggles on their head or push them down around their neck. If they are carrying them it is possible they will put them down or get in a panic at the last minute. It will also stop them chewing and biting them - goggles always snap in the whipping area never in the pool - now why would that be? They should also have their swim-cap on in plenty of time. **Lads need to tie their costumes up tight - double-knot!**



Swimmers will be lined up in the whipping area in heat order and then asked to go forward and stand behind the relevant lane. The timekeeper for the lane will ask your swimmer to confirm their name. For a card open meet your swimmers card will be handed back to them in the Whipping area and they should hand the card to the timekeeper for their lane. Depending on how many competitors there are in an event there can be a lot of heats and it can take absolutely ages! However your swimmers' race will be over pretty quickly so be sure you don't miss it by an inappropriate moment for the loo, coffee or a snooze.

After your swimmers last event they may go home (but not at a team gala). Although it is necessary to tell the Coach, so he/she knows who is still on the poolside, your swimmer does not have to wait for the end of the event unless the Coach advises otherwise.

At a team gala you will need to sign in/out with the team manager. Please see Arena and Octopus Team Guidelines.

Results



When the race is over the times for each swimmer are recorded on the computer system which produces the final result sheet after all the heats for a particular event have been swam. Results sheets are generally displayed around the poolside for the swimmers and around the spectator area for you to read, as soon as it is possible to do so. They are also often posted on the host's swimming club website within a few days of each gala. Coaches will often time swimmers splits and give invaluable advice and support. For ipad or iphone there is a Swim Meet app which costs about £5 per year which most galas are now linked to, results are often uploaded before the announcer gets them! (Meet Mobile) A swim-down where possible is

important as this gently relaxes the muscles after racing. At Club Championships medals will be presented on the evening and trophies will be presented at the annual presentation evening.

Speeding Tickets

For some lower graded open meets there are a set of upper cut-off times (usually UQT or UQT plus a few seconds), which swimming faster than these times earns a 'speeding-ticket'. Check the small print in the gala conditions, usually found on the host clubs website, to see if there will be speeding tickets and if so whether the cut of times are UQT or above. Getting a speeding ticket means that the swimmer is not eligible for medals (and is effectively disqualified) but it is a very positive indicator of a 'good time' for that race, in that age group. So your swimmer should be reassured that a speeding-ticket is a good thing just as is a win or a placing or personal-best.



Medals

Generally medals are awarded for the top three in each stroke/age group and ribbons for 4th to 8th places. These can be collected at the event any time after the results are published.

What should the swimmer do when not swimming?

Swimmers are expected to stay on poolside during the meet. They must not leave the poolside without a coaches



express permission. Coaches need to speak to swimmers during the day for either race strategy advice or to send them up for marshalling to get ready for their race. If your swimmer wants to leave poolside, even if it's just to go to the toilet, they *must* let the Coach know to ensure that they don't miss their race. The Coach has a whole team to keep track of, which can be very difficult if swimmers keep disappearing at crucial moments. If a swimmer leaves poolside to spend some time with parents they must get back in plenty of time for their next race, and let the Coach know they are back.

After their swim it is vital that your swimmer immediately see the Coach, swim down and then if time permits visit with you. Please do not beckon your swimmer over to the spectator area after a race to discuss/congratulate their performance. There should be no messing about in the swim down pool. Swimmers should be tidy and pick up all their litter. There are usually plenty of rubbish bags and bins at meets so do encourage your swimmer to use them.

Although swimmers are encouraged to support their team-mates it can be helpful, especially for open meets, for them to bring something, such as a book, magazine, to keep them occupied during quieter moments. If they do bring electronic games we ask that they only be played during the breaks in the sessions. Do be aware that neither the club nor the venue can be held responsible for loss or damage to property so your swimmer should not bring valuables or things that can be damaged by being in a damp atmosphere.

The Lingo!

Consideration or Qualification time – Generally there are LQT's and UQT's which are upper and lowest entry times for a particular event at an open meet/gala. Some galas set consideration times and entries are confirmed or rejected after the closing date.

DQ'd and disq. - Abbreviation for disqualified on result sheets and time cards – swimmers should try not to be disheartened but take the DQ as a point to train on. It is hard!

Entry time -The time submitted by the club for a swimmer being entered in a gala. If entries are made well in advance, the entry time may not be the swimmers current PB.

Form Stroke -One of the three strokes having specific requirements (ie. 200M, Breaststroke, Butterfly or Backstroke). Freestyle is not a Form Stroke but is used for distance events, such as 200/400/800 or 1500m depending on the swimmers age and sex.



Heat Declared Winner (HDW) -When no final is swum and the winner is declared on the times swum in the heats

I.M. - individual medley. The competitor swims all four strokes in the following order: - butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke and freestyle.

Licensed meets: This term has now replaced "designated meets". These are the only meets via which you can qualify for county, regional and national competitions

Long course -Events held in a 50m pool

Short course – Events held in a 25m pool

Medley relay -Four swimmers each swim a different stroke. The order is always backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly and freestyle

How can we see the Results?

Times may be posted around the event on the day of the gala. Generally the host club will post them on their club website within a few days. SCSC will aim to distribute them to the club in the week following the gala and put them on the gala results page of the website. They are normally on the ASA Rankings/Results page within a week of the gala.

And last of all Good Luck!

