

Open Meets – How they work

What happens to my entry?

Once you have applied to enter a Gala, the organisers will communicate back those entries that have been accepted and rejected. Every Gala has a capacity of how many they can take – most edit on times, but some edit on a 1st come / 1st Served basis.

The Fixtures Secretary will communicate by email and on the website, those acceptances / rejections.

Refunds will be returned to you once the organisers have processed all the entries – this can take a few weeks, this is normal.

What to do on the day?

The Entry form normally indicates the Registration and Warm up times for each gala. This may be subject to change by the organisers – often due to numbers accepted – and any alterations will be communicated to you by the Fixtures Secretary.

If there are no alterations, then you are responsible for attending as per entry form. We do not normally issue reminders.

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Registration

The majority of open meets now operate under an ‘active withdrawal’ system. This means that the meet organiser will assume the entered swimmer is swimming unless they are withdrawn in advance or on the day by the coach.

Some meets you may need to “sign in” before the warmup via the sign in desk. If a meet is running like this, then it is essential that swimmers sign in for the races they want to swim. Any races they have not signed in for they will be withdrawn from.

Warmup

Swimmers are normally invited to warm up in different age groups and different sexes – again listen to the announcement. The Warm Up is just that, you are looking to warm up the muscles and have a feel for the pool as a prelude to competing. Younger swimmers need constant reminding not to blow their socks off in the Warm Up – save it for the races.

There is normally a warm up at the start of each session. Each warmup sessions typically lasts between 15 – 25 minutes.

Pool Side Team

For those Galas that we encourage swimmers to enter, the Club will have, onsite, a Pool Side team that will comprise at least 1 Coach, the Team Manager and possibly a few other Parent Volunteers.

These are critical as younger swimmers are like sheep and do tend to wander off at the most inopportune times.

All Pool Side Team members are fully DBS checked and Swim England Registered – The non Coaches are all generally parents of current swimmers.

Plan your entries

Open Galas are normally all day affairs. They are long and tiring days in very humid conditions – both for Parents and swimmers. For the younger swimmers try and plan logically. If most of their events are in the 1st session, and their last one is in the last session, then give some thought as to whether you really want to be sitting around for a further 5 hours for 1 race where they are likely to be jaded and not at their strongest.

If you can even the day out so they compete in each session then this less of a challenge for both parent and swimmer.

Similarly, younger swimmers cannot perform to the top of their game doing 6 or so races in a day, they must fade at some point.

Results

Most galas tend to use the same software to run galas, so you will get used to Result sheets. Result sheets are normally printed throughout the day and a copy posted pool side, with another copy posted up where the Spectators can view them. These can take a while after an event to appear (this is unfortunately very normal!)

Some meets now use the mobile app 'Meet Mobile' which gives you live results and rankings for each meet.

Medals

Most Open galas have medals, these are normally set for each sex at yearly age groups, but some do only issue medals for say 2 year bands (U16, U14 etc).

Some events also issue Certificates of ribbons for 4th / 5th / 6th, this is starting to fade out.

Do not despair if you fail to collect a medal, these will get forwarded to the Club post-event if uncollected.

If you do check the results and have secured a reward, then normally there are medal tables to go to, to collect these. These are normally on pool side.

Events

Events alternate between Boys and Girls events throughout the day. If the first event of the session is a boy's event, then the boys will warm up for that session first.

This means that swimmers get a rest, but are also able to make the "Whipping" for their next event.

Whipping or Marshalling

This is where the officials for the meet start pulling together all of the swimmers for the next 1 or 2 events, to get all of the swimmers into their heat and lane orders. (Heats are seeded by entry time)

Rounding up the swimmers and making sure they get to "Whip" for the right events, is the responsibility of the Pool Side Team.

Before each swimmer is despatched to the "Whipping" area or "Call Room", the Pool Side Coach will normally have a few words to remind the swimmers of technique, what to remember and what event they are doing!

Post Race

Generally, most pools that hold galas have what is called a swim down pool. This pool is literally for swimmers to swim down after a race, thus controlling the recovery of their muscles post race.

There is always a temptation for younger swimmers to use this pool as a fun pool. This will be stopped where seen by Leisure Centre Staff & our Pool Side Team, as the older swimmers rely on this warm down and do not take kindly to having another swimmer obstruct or land on them!

Times

Most events run on electric timing. During the race and at the 50m turn or end the display will provide times. Where the electronic timing fails – and that can be for a number of reasons – there are 2 further back ups.

These back ups though do not normally get announced and you have to wait for the results sheet, to get posted, to find the time.

Even Electronic timing is subject to override by the referee in certain extreme circumstances. 99% of the time it can be relied upon, but until the Results are published, the electronic time on the scoreboard is provisional.

Parents

Parents normally tend to congregate in the spectator gallery area in Team groups

Parents must not go poolside at any time. You need a Pool Side pass to be Pool Side, and that goes for those Parents who are CRB checked with the Club.

The fact you may hold a DBS clearance with some other institution cuts no ice at any Swim gala.

Galas tend to have Parents full of anticipation at the start of a day and totally flagged at the end. Sitting around all day in a cramped seat in humid conditions is not a lot of fun, especially if your sibling is swimming frequently.

Take things to occupy yourself: highlighting Watford swimmers on your entry programme and writing down Watford swimmer times against their listed entry time has limited long term upside.

Parents can make arrangements to take pictures, either on a phone/camera/recorder, but this will only be possible if you register your intent to do so with the event organisers (registration desk). If you do wish to do this, you will be asked to complete a declaration form, and often wear a label that indicates you have registered.

If you have not registered, and are observed taking pictures, then the organisers reserve the right, under Swim England Child Protection Laws, to remove you from their gala.

Between sessions

Get a change of scenery and get some fresh air. If you leave the building then Parents need to remember to take their programme with them, most events only allow re-entry upon presentation of the programme.

Do not stray too far and if leaving before the end of a session then please ensure the Team Manager is notified of your departure.

If you leave the area, then you are responsible for ensuring you are back on time. Frequently sessions overrun when – this happens a change to the warm up time and session start time will be communicated via the PA system. Make sure if you have left the area that somebody who is staying has your mobile and can contact you with such changes.

Don't forget you may need to sign in ahead of the next session.

What to wear

Swimmers are to turn up to competitions in club kit.

Many swimmers will have a "Competition" suit as well as suits to do their Warm Ups in. By "Competition" suits we mean the more expensive race suits, many of which are so scientifically advanced that they are too fragile to wear on a continuing daily basis unless you have very deep pockets.

Many of these suits (and this doesn't mean the top of the range Olympic swimmer LAZR type suits) need a lot of care and attention to retain their "design advantage", i.e immediate washing in Cold Water after removal.

Consequently, at events where our more elite swimmers take part, you will see a number of them disappear back into the changing rooms after each warm up to switch to their racing costume.

At the more junior end this investment is probably not financially merited, but the idea of having a change of costume for different session will have merits if your child is likely to get back changed into outdoor clothes for example,(to get that fresh air) as the idea of trying to put a wet costume back on tends to be unappealing to many.

Whilst on Pool Side, no outdoor shoes are allowed, so many swimmers take flip-flops which we would recommend.

If swimmers are allowed to climb into the spectator area to visit parents, they will only be allowed, by the event organisers, if they are wearing something on their feet and are wearing something over their costume (T-Bag).

As for Parents, even in the harshest winter, pool side spectator areas are notoriously baking hot, and frequently the lack of fresh air, and heat generated by the assembled masses mean that you need to think carefully about what to wear for the day.

You normally know when there is a swim gala on at a Leisure Centre, when you see loads of Parents, in almost beach wear, queuing up outside a venue in the coldest of temperatures. Plan accordingly.

What to eat?

Please visit our nutrition page for detailed information on what to eat.

What to pack ...

Swimmers should normally have in their Kit Bag the following:

- Costume(s)
- Goggles (include a spare pair – they always break or get lost at the most inopportune time)
- A couple of towels (1 for Pool Side & 1 to get changed) – think about the number of sessions
- Club Swim Hat, in Competition these are recommended for Boys also (include a spare)
- Team Kit
- Flip Flops
- Snacks