

Parents' Guide to Galas & Competitive Swimming

Introduction

Wandsworth Swimming Club is a competitive swimming club. Once a swimmer becomes a member they will be offered opportunities to attend swimming galas or meets. Under ASA Rules swimmers who have not yet reached their ninth birthday may ONLY compete in internal club galas.

The young swimmers first experience of competitive swimming in the club will usually be in one of our Mini-Galas, which we hold on regular basis at Ernest Bevin College pool (approximately three times per season). During these Mini-Galas our youngest swimmers from Pre-Development and Development 1 & 2 squads are given opportunities to swim one or two length races in each of the four strokes (Freestyle, Backstroke, Breaststroke and Butterfly) in a fun, friendly yet competitive environment. Swimmers are ranked by age, youngest first, and often swim in mixed gender individual races and relays.

Club Championships

The next internal event the young swimmer will come across is the Wandsworth Swimming Club Championships which typically takes place at the beginning of each season (Sept-Oct) and is spread out over 4 weekends. ALL CLUB MEMBERS ARE EXPECTED TO TAKE PART. For the younger swimmers this is a good introduction to how competitive events are organized and gives them invaluable experience of swimming a variety of events.

The Club Championships, which is a licensed meet, also allows swimmers to achieve and record times which can then be used to enter Open Meets - once they reach the age of 9.

Our most experienced swimmers, many of whom have competed and medalled at National level, take part in the Club Championships and are happy to share their experiences and demonstrate their skills.

The Club Championships cover all the competitive strokes and distances as follows:

- 50 metres: Backstroke, Breaststroke, Butterfly, Freestyle
- 100 metres: Backstroke, Breaststroke, Butterfly, Freestyle, Individual Medley*
- 200 metres: Backstroke, Breaststroke, Butterfly, Freestyle, Individual Medley*
- 400 metres: Freestyle, Individual Medley*
- 800 metres: Freestyle (girls only)
- 1500 metres: Freestyle (boys only)

Additionally, as an introduction to competition for swimmers aged 8 and under, we hold 25 metre races in all four strokes.

*Note: The Individual Medley (IM) is an event in which the swimmers swim each stroke in a specified order - Butterfly, Backstroke, Breaststroke and Freestyle.

Our Club Championships are run as official 'licensed' meets to enable swimmers to gain qualification times for the Surrey County Championships which are held in January and February as well as other Open Meets throughout the season.

Clearly, some events in the Club Championships will not be suitable for some of the younger and less experienced swimmers so, if in doubt as what events to enter, speak to the relevant coaches. They will advise and guide you through the process.

Medals are awarded to the top three swimmers in each event in each age group. It is important to remember that winning your race (your heat) doesn't automatically guarantee a place in the top three. Heats may combine swimmers from different age groups and there may be many heats in each age group.

Dates and details for the Club Championships are sent out and published on the Club website well in advance of the deadline for entries. Please mark the dates in your diaries as the club expects ALL swimmers to compete in every event they have been advised and entered for.

League and Gala Fixtures

Wandsworth Swimming Club competes in two main types of swimming meets:

- Team meets where the club competes as a team against other clubs
- Meets where the swimmer competes individually - there will generally be a significant number of swimmers attending each meet.

The club ensures there is a varied competition calendar for the whole year and this is available in the Competition section of the club website which is constantly updated as meets are added. Results from meets and swimmers' times are also posted there as soon as they are available.

At team meets your child will form part of a team as we race against other clubs. As a competitive swimming club, coaches assume members will be available to compete for the club if selected. Although we accept that this isn't always possible, we do expect swimmers to do their best to make themselves available when selected. Selected swimmers will be expected not to engage in any other sporting activity on the day of the meet to avoid an injury and becoming too fatigued to perform at the required high level.

Team members are selected on merit. Coaches spend many hours on team selection to field the best possible team combination, given the type and format of the meet. It is not simply a matter of selecting the faster swimmer for each age group or stroke; it is about assembling a team that will



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swim for the best possible outcome for the Club. The Coaching Team, led by the Head Coach, will do its best to give as much notice as possible to parents and they appreciate a timely response.

Becoming unavailable at the last minute or, even worse, withdrawing from the team, lets down the Club and all the other team members - as it isn't always possible to arrange substitutes at very short notice.

For example, four swimmers (both boys and girls) are normally selected from each age group because relays require four swimmers; one for each stroke in the medley relays and four swimmers in the freestyle relays. If a swimmer in the youngest age group were to drop out at the last minute and substitutes were not available, that team could not compete in the relay team events and many points would be lost. With promotion and relegation of the entire team at stake in the league galas and meets, every single point counts. In addition, as a competitive club, commitment to competing for the club is one of the main criteria for progressing through the club. Repeated refusal to compete in meets or league competitions calls a swimmer's commitment into question, and in turn his or her place in a particular squad.

Swimmers from Performance squads will be expected to have swimming as their number one activity outside school and therefore not having other sports conflicting with competitive swimming.

As a parent of a competitive swimmer, please therefore look carefully at the competition list and calendar and try to ensure your child is available for events for which they are likely to be selected. The coaches are always available to offer advice if required.

The National Arena League

The National Arena League (formerly the National Speedo League) is the most important league fixture in the club's competition calendar. The National Arena League is split into seven regions across the country: East Midlands, London, North East, North West, South, Western, and West Midlands. Wandsworth Swimming Club competes in the London Region which is divided into Premier, Division 1 and Division 2. Currently we are in Division 1. Details of the League can be found at www.nationalswimmingleague.org.uk/london Teams are seeded in Rounds 1 and 2 with the aim of ranking the teams so that the top final round gala comprises the eight strongest teams fighting for promotion. The result of the final round gala determines the final position in the Division and ultimately promotion/relegation to or from a Division within the region.

Open Meets

Open Meets are essentially galas in which the swimmers are not selected as part of a team.

Instead, swimmers must achieve QT's (Qualifying Times) set out by the meet's organizers.

These are compared with a swimmer's PB (Personal Best time) in an eligibility report run by the Club's Competition Secretary to determine what events a swimmer is eligible to enter at a particular meet. Although swimmers are still representing WSC, they also are swimming for themselves with the aim of obtaining an improved time which would qualify them for other Open Meets as well as County, Regional and National Championships.

British Swimming and the ASA (Amateur Swimming Association) award licenses to meets at levels 1 (highest) to 4 (lowest).

- **Level 1 meets** will have minimum standard qualifying times and are broadly aimed at swimmers whose target is to qualify for the National Championships which can only be achieved in a Long Course (50 m) pool; with the exception of the Swim England Winter Meet which is normally held as a Short Course (25m) meet.
- **Level 2 meets** take place in Short Course (25m) pool and have minimum qualifying times and may also have upper limit times; these are aimed at swimmers whose target is the Regional and County qualifying times (QT's).
- **Level 3 meets** typically have upper and lower limit qualifying times (swimmers may not enter if their times are faster than the specified QT's) and are aimed at County and Development level swimmers.
- **Level 4 meets** may have QT's in the same way as Level 3 meets, but they have more freedom in terms of using electronic timing and officials. These are suitable for obtaining QT's for County Championships and Level 3 Meets. Generally Level 4 is only used for a club's own internal championships to allow times be put on British Swimming rankings and also to be used for qualification for the Surrey County Championships.

Open meets are open to anyone who meets the appropriate age and qualifying times criteria and who pays the required entry fees. The club attends various Open Meets throughout the year. These are specifically selected by the Head Coach and the Coaching Team and are a crucial component of swimmers training programme. Swimmers are not allowed to attend Open Meets on their own (unless agreed with the Head Coach).

When the club supports an Open Meet there will always be a WSC coach present on poolside to support the swimmers, monitor, record and evaluate their performance and give feedback.

You must always contact your child's current squad's coach to seek advice as to which individual events your child should enter prior to submitting an entry form to the Competition Secretary.

Surrey County Championships

The Surrey County Championships (often referred to as 'The Surreys') are open to swimmers from all clubs in the county. For competition purposes, swimmers must be members of an affiliated Surrey club at the closing date of entering the competition and must be registered through that club with the ASA.

The events are held during January, February and sometimes March across various venues (Surrey Sports Park Guildford, Crystal Palace, Guildford Spectrum, London Aquatic Centre) depending upon the event.

Qualifying times must have been achieved at a licensed meet between the end of the last championships and a specific cut-off date ahead of current year's competition. These qualifying times tend to change from year to year and can be found on our club website and on the Surrey Swimming website www.surreyswimming.org

The coaches and the Competition Secretary coordinate entries to the Surrey County Championships.

London Region Championships

London Swimming is one of the eight 'Swim England' defined regions and covers the area of Greater London. These 'Regionals' take place twice a year:

London Region Winter Championships

Are normally held over one weekend in November in a Short Course pool at London Aquatic Centre and are often a qualifying meet for the Swim England Winter Meet. The qualifying times are split in only two age groups : Junior (16 years & under) and Senior (17 years & over). If the Swim England Winter Meet is held as Long Course meet, the London Region Winter Championships will also be held as Long Course meet.

London Region Summer Championships

Are usually held over 3 weekends in April and May and are split between the Youth Championships (swimmers aged 15 & over) and the Age Group Championships (swimmers aged 14 & under with the minimum age being 10 years old).

The qualifying times for the 'Regionals' are understandably tougher than the county championships (depending on age group) and must have been achieved at a Level 1, 2 or 3 licensed meet since the date set out by London Swimming (this is generally the date of the Championships in the year). Further details can be found on the London Swimming website www.londonswimming.org

The National Championships

The 'Nationals' are the pinnacle to which every young swimmer aspires. Swimmers from the Performance squads are expected to work towards this goal from the very moment they are accepted into the Junior Performance squad.

There are three major National Championships:

Swim England National Winter Championships

This meet is usually held as Short Course (25m) at Ponds Forge in Sheffield in December. The qualifying times are split in two main age groups; Boys , Girls 15 years & under; and Men, Women Open. Times must be achieved at the Level 1 or 2 licensed meet.

The British Swimming Championships

Is the highlight of the national events calendar and the epitome of high performance swimming as it creates a platform for outstanding results including personal bests and new records. The very best competitors from all corners of the UK will swim to win this prestigious event. It is a Long Course meet held at a different venue in the UK each year. The qualifying times are extremely hard to achieve and are split in two age groups: Youth (women 16 & under, men 17 & under) and Open

There are also consideration qualifying times (CT's) which are marginally slower than the automatic QT's. Both QT's and CT's must be achieved at accredited competitions and since date set out by British Swimming.

The British Summer Championships

Is the annual end of season meet that takes place across six days at the Ponds Forge International Sports Centre in Sheffield.

The Championships form part of British Swimming's broader Performance Pathway strategy which aims to increasing and support junior talent on the journey to senior medal-winning performances. Swimmers are invited based on the national rankings following an advertised qualification period (often referred to as 'qualifying window' usually covering the period between mid March and the end of May). The top 24 swimmers in each age group and event are then invited to compete at the Championships. The purpose of the event is to expose the greatest number of young, talented swimmers to a national competition environment whilst continuing to provide athletes a transitioning opportunity to become competitive senior swimmers. The minimum age is 13 for girls and 14 for boys.

The Swim England National Summer Meet

Is Swim England's biggest domestic swimming event of the year. The Summer Meet forms part of a swimming competition structure in Great Britain whereby the top ranked swimmers in each event are invited to compete at the British Swimming Summer Championships. The next ranked swimmers at Swim England affiliated clubs - or those who have chosen to be ranked as an English swimmer - are invited to compete at the Nationals. The rankings are on swimmers' performances at level 1 meets during a qualification window, typically between March and May of the same calendar year .

The minimum age is 12 for girls and 13 for boys. The age of each swimmer for ALL meets shall be as at 31st December of the year.

Disqualifications

Sooner or later, swimmers will be introduced to the concept of disqualification (DQ). Like all sports, competitive swimming is governed by strict technical rules that are there to make sure races are run fairly for all swimmers. All meet officials such as referees and judges have passed examinations (both theoretical and practical). Officials would prefer not to disqualify any swimmers. However, they have to maintain standards without which some swimmers could gain an unfair advantage. We do understand that it is very upsetting to new swimmers when DQ's happen, but the Club has to expose swimmers to these rules from the very beginning of their swimming journey.

When a DQ occurs it is normally announced, along with the reason, when the result of the race is being announced. The coach will also have been notified or can determine the DQ from codes on the printed results. It is much better to be disqualified early at an internal club event and learn from the disqualification than to be disqualified at a County Championships or National League event, later in a swimmer's career when it really matters. Most swimmers have experienced a DQ at some point, even at the Olympic Games - it is simply a part of the journey!

The main (but not only) reasons for disqualifications are:

- A false start - there are no second chances on the start in swimming. Please note that a false start might be no more than a swimmer moving (twitching) on the starting blocks once the starter has called 'Take your marks'
- Incorrect stroke technique
- Incorrect touch at the turn or finish
- Incorrect turn
- An early take-over during a relay race Being disqualified should be seen as a learning experience; it is not the end of the world. It happens even at the highest performance level.

BAGCATs

By the time swimmers get to the stage of competing in Open Meets, County, Regional and, hopefully, National Championships they will have been introduced to the British Age Group

Categories, or 'BAGCATs'. The BAGCATs are based on the swimming philosophy that swimmers at an early stage of their development (14 years and under) should compete to win an overall category award rather than specialise in a particular stroke or event. The BAGCATs therefore define four categories: sprint, form, distance and medley. They use a points system to measure and compare swimmers' performance

- Sprint - best 50/100m - sprint performance in any stroke
- Form - best form stroke performance (i.e form strokes are those with a defined form according to ASA Laws) - thus best performance in 200m backstroke, breaststroke or butterfly
- Distance - best performance in 200m, 400m, 800m (girls) or 1500m (boys)
- Medley - best performance in 100m, 200m or 400m Individual Medley

The sum of these scores determines the overall points and a point must be scored in each applicable category. It is highly recommended that all swimmers aged 14 and under swim and compete in a very wide variety of events with the medley events and 200m events being of a paramount importance.

Useful links:

- [Anti-doping](#)
- [Nutrition](#)