

# Competitive Swimming

## A Guide for Parents and Swimmers

### Introduction

If you are new to competitive swimming, then don't worry - not all of the following applies to you! As a swimmer progresses, then more of the following information is relevant. The most important thing for newcomers to grasp is that it is vital to compete and get times in a variety of events. Hopefully the following will explain why.

### Starting out...

We encourage children to compete as we believe it is one of the key ways to make a swimmer faster and better. It's really important that swimmers make an effort to enter competitions for several reasons:

- It gives swimmers an idea of what it's like to compete
- It gives swimmers their times, and therefore is a clear marker of how they are progressing
- It gives swimmers a goal towards which they can work
- It gives swimmers a sense of achievement
- It shows the coaches how the swimmers cope with a competitive environment
- Gaining new improved times are one of the major factors in helping the coaches to decide whether a swimmer is ready to move up to the next level/lane.

To make your experience of swim competitions more enjoyable, we suggest the following:

Bring plenty of drinks (not fizzy) and healthy snacks for the swimmers and for parents

Swimmers bring a change of costume and a couple of towels plus spare goggles.

Swimmers bring a "t-bag" top to slip on to keep warm between races. Alternatively, a football type t-shirt is good as they dry quickly and don't soak up the wet like a cotton t-shirt.

### The next stage

The Open Meet Secretary at WSC makes a big effort to find swim meets outside of the club that are suitable for swimmers who are just dipping their toes in the competitive water. The club aims to find swim meets close to Worthing that are low key, relaxed events that will be an enjoyable experience for the swimmers.

These meets often have races 50m, 100m and 200m in length.

When the competitions come up, we put a notice up on the board and we also try to target the right swimmer with the right event. If you're unsure what races your child should enter, please speak to your child Lane Coach or Karen Wardley our Swim Meet Secretary.

### Club Championships

Every year the club holds 2 main club championships, in May and October.

Who can enter? Everyone who trains at WSC.

Why should I enter? I'm never going to get a medal!

The person you're competing against is yourself. The important thing is to get a time for a swim. In our club championships swimmers can enter a race they've never done before and get a time for it, so that when the chance comes to compete at another competition in that race, the swimmer will be able to because they have a time.

## **Leagues**

The coach/gala secretary/team managers will select the best available team to compete in team galas. Selection depends on age groups and abilities required. Swimmers are selected to compete in events as the best choice for the team. The number of swims a swimmer competes in will vary, and changes can be made to the team up till the last minute. These galas give swimmers an opportunity to swim as a team where they earn points for their team not individual awards. They are fun galas as well as competitive

### **Sussex League**

This is a tournament between 14 teams in Sussex split into 2 divisions. Each team will swim in 3 galas between January and July, competing against each other team in their division once. Each team hosts one gala. All the galas have the same races.

### **Rother League**

In 1977 sixteen clubs in Hampshire and around the South Coast set up the Minor League, a B Graded competition for smaller clubs and swimmers of larger clubs who were usually excluded from 'first-team' galas.

The League recognises the various sizes, strengths and facilities of clubs so the format of each competition is designed to accommodate these differences. Although most galas have the usual 6 team arrangement the rules do allow for 5-team galas, so that smaller pools can be brought into use, or 7/8 team galas to be run to obtain optimum use of the many 8-lane pools available. In addition "Postal Swimming" can be included thereby allowing some teams to take part without onerous travel costs.

### **National ARENA League (formerly SPEEDO)**

The elite competition, held on a regional and divisional basis over 3 rounds. Our fastest swimmers compete against clubs from around the South West of England, often swimming against National and Regional qualifiers.

### **Junior ARENA League**

A national competition for swimmers aged 12 and under held on a regional basis with the Divisional winners competing at Ponds Forge, Sheffield. Our quickest swimmers in the younger age groups are selected to participate in this event.

**As always, each squad is selected by the Coaches and Team Manager and based on ability at all times.**

## **Open Meets**

Throughout the year many clubs hold their own open meet. Swimmers from other clubs can enter the events they wish to as long as they have the right qualifying times.

### **Levels 1, 2, 3 & 4**

There are three different levels of open meet. The hardest level with the fastest qualifying times is level one. Only the top swimmers in the club will qualify.

Level two and three is easier and most children in the main pool will qualify, as will some in the little pool.

Level 4 is the easiest and no qualifying times required but may have upper limit times. WSC Championships & Sussex County Development Meet are Level 4 Galas.

(you cannot enter an event if your time is faster than the upper limit time)

## **Qualifying times and cut-off times**

- A qualifying time is a time that is required in order to enter an event
  - A cut-off time is a time that is the fastest a swimmer can be in order to enter an event
- For example: 13 year old Alex wants to enter the 100m Butterfly at Brighton Open Meet and his time is 1.16.20.

The qualifying time for the race for 13 year old boys is shown in the entry pack as 1.19.90, so he is fast enough enter. The cut off time for this race is 1.12.30. If Alex's time had been 1.12.20, he would have been too fast and wouldn't be allowed to enter that race.

## **Development Meet**

When is it?

The Development meet is held annually in November. It is organised by Sussex County ASA.

Who is it for? Everyone who trains in the main pool.

The Development meet is for all those swimmers who are trying to achieve qualifying time for the County Championship.

How do I enter? Contact Open Meet Secretary for more details.

The aim of the Development meet is to encourage younger and less experienced swimmers to compete and to give them more race experience as well as achieve a County Championships Qualifying time.

## **Sussex County Championships**

County Championships are held every year over two or three weekends in February/March. It is really important that as many of our swimmers as possible enter the WSC Club Championships in October and also the Sussex County Development Meet in November as it is an opportunity to achieve County qualification times in time for the County Championships in February /March.

The County Championships are prestigious and very important to the club. Each club taking part gets points for each swimmer that does well, so it's crucial that all those who can enter, do so. County Championships have qualifying times. Swimmers are automatically invited to do the events in which they've qualified and are given their invitation personally.

The top three swimmers in each age group get a medal and the next 5 get a ribbon.

## **BAGCATs (British Age Group Category)**

For each swim a child does at County Championship, they are awarded BAGCAT points. In order to get a maximum number of points available, a swimmer needs to enter a range of events and points are taken from the best swim done of all of the following:

- 50m sprint - any stroke
- 100m - any stroke
- 200m form stroke - that means not freestyle
- long distance freestyle ie 200m, 400m, 800m or 1500m
- individual medley - any distance

Swimmers who come in the top eight of the BAGCAT points system will be selected for future development by Sussex County ASA. Please bear this in mind when choosing your races for County Championships.

## **Getting to the top...**

### **Regionals/Districts**

The next step up from County Championships is Regionals/Districts. The UK is divided up into 8 regions and we compete in the South East County region comprising Sussex, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, the Channel Islands, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and the parts of Surrey and Kent that are outside London.

Who can go?

To get to the Regional a swimmer has to get a qualifying time - These times are tough, so it's a huge achievement when a swimmer achieve a qualifying time.

When is it?

Youth Regionals (girls age 14+ and boys age 15+) are held at the beginning of May, so qualifying times need to be achieved by the middle of April at the latest.

Age Group Regionals (girls age 10-13 and boys age 10-14) are held in June, so qualifying times need to be achieved by approximately the end of April.

### **Top of the heap**

The ultimate goal is to qualify for the National Championships. Only 1% of all competitive swimmers make it to the Nationals. Qualifying times get tougher every year and can be found on the British Swimming website.

When is it?

Nationals are held in July and the last point at which you can get a qualifying time is at Regionals in June. Qualifying times must also be achieved at a Level 1 or 2 meet.

### **And finally...**

If you have any questions about any of the above or if there's something you don't understand, please don't hesitate to ask - after all, even the veterans of the club were all new to this once! Please ask the Head Coach, Swimming Co-ordinator or Open Meet Secretary.