

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 ASA 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 National Championships.

Galas are team events such as Arena League and Diddy League. The teams for these are selected by the Head Coach a few weeks prior to the gala. Galas tend to take place on a Saturday evening and swimmers may be required to travel to the event on a team coach.

These events are run by Clubs and volunteer parents like you.

Why enter an Open Meet?

- To see how much progress swimmers have made
- To put into practice what has been learnt in training
- To improve on Personal Best times (PBs) or gain some new times if new to racing or a particular event
- 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 swim in Academy 1 or higher and are nine years old or older then you are eligible to take part in an Open Meet. 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. If you need advice on which races you should enter, ask your Coach.

How many Club Members participate?

This varies according to the level of meet and the time of year but generally there are several clubs, 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 Open Meets coordinator (bbfopenmeets@gmail.com) about a 'meet' that is coming up soon. Entry is usually via TU which is submitted online, and the race fees are posted to your accounts.

There are two types of Open Meets. The first being first come first served which may require a fast turnaround of entries to ensure acceptance – this can sometimes be done in as little as 48 hours. Secondly there are meets where criteria is set to scratch 'SCR' (reject) swimmers. Some Open Meets have set times that have to be achieved for each event and other have No Faster than Times (NFT's) 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 are not required to do all sessions unless you want to and can leave when you have swum all your races but please check with the Coach/Team Manager before leaving.

Going to a Meet

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

Make sure you allow plenty of time to travel to the Meet and find somewhere to park.

The details of where the pool is will be on the email from the Open Meets Coordinator, on our website under the events section or on Facebook in our events section.

There are often several clubs competing in the same Meet so parking can sometimes be a problem. Warm-ups usually start one hour before the Meet start time, and we usually ask swimmers to be there 20-30 minutes in advance of warm up and report to your Coach and Team Manager and sign in.

There is a warm-up before every session and there are often three sessions in a day with a short break in between.

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 occasionally 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 Meets in the Club tracksuit, onesie or Club shirt. 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 into 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.)

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. Swimmers are to stay with their team until they have competed in all events within a session, then they can go to see spectators in the stands. Nipping across to see spectators between races in a session makes it difficult for the Team Manager to keep track of everyone!

During the Meet

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 and Team Manager 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 the Team Manager will 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/Team

Manager 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 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 at the end of the session.

Once out of the water swimmers are required to put on a t shirt and shorts, whilst sitting with their team and moving around the building.

Checklist

- Club t-shirts and shorts (if you have them) if not a navy or dark t-shirt and shorts. You may want to wear these poolside
- Spare shorts/joggers/t-shirt to wear in breaks and to return home in
- Two sets of swimwear
- Two towels
- Two Club swimming hats
- Two sets of goggles
- Drinks (water or squash) and sensible snacks for between events
- Lunch or tea if there are more than one session
- Poolside shoes (sliders/ 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 photographic equipment at Meets, 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.

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. It is quite normal for young and less experienced swimmers to be DQ'd (disqualified) for several reasons. Coaches will explain to swimmers why they have been DQ's (part of the learning curve!). 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.

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/Team Manager if they wish to leave poolside and

can only do so once they have swum in all the events in their session as to avoid missing their race.

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 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 DQ's happen 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.

A little nutrition advice...

The Day Before

When competition time comes around, you'll have plenty on your mind already. So, the day before the event, keep exercise to a minimum – if anything at all – and eat meals and snacks high in complex carbohydrates. You need to keep those glycogen stores topped up.

- Drink fluids little and often to stay properly hydrated.
- Eat little and often – every two to four hours to keep your blood sugar levels steady and fuel your muscles in preparation for your event.
- Avoid big meals or over-eating in the evening – this will almost certainly make you feel uncomfortable and lethargic the next day.
- Try to stick to familiar foods. Curries, spicy foods, baked beans and pulses (unless you are used to eating them) can cause gas and bloating, so avoid eating anything that may cause stomach discomfort the next day. It's best to stick to foods that you are familiar and compatible with!

The Morning of the Event

Don't swim on empty. Even if you feel nervous, make breakfast happen. Stick to easily digested foods – cereal with milk, porridge, banana with yoghurt, some fruit or toast with jam.

If you're really struggling, try liquid meals such as milkshakes, yoghurt drinks or a smoothie.

It's a good idea to rehearse your competition meal routine in training so you know exactly what agrees with you.

Snacks Between Heats

Try to eat as soon as possible after your swim to give yourself as long as possible to recover if you have to swim again.

High fat and simple sugar foods will do you no favours in competition – instead search out the complex carbohydrates again.

If you can't stomach anything solid try sports drinks, flavoured milk or diluted juice that will help replenish your energy supplies and assist the recovery of aching muscles.

The list below offers great food options to be snacking on in and around training for a competition. Remember to keep eating healthy foods from your regular diet though, such as fresh vegetables, nuts and fruits. Here are some more you can try:

- Water, diluted fruit juice with a pinch of salt or a sports drink
- Pasta salad, Prepared vegetable crudités e.g., carrots, peppers, cucumber
- Plain sandwiches e.g., chicken, tuna, cheese with salad, banana, peanut butter
- Bananas, grapes, apples, plums, pears
- Dried fruit e.g., raisins, apricots, mango
- Smoothies, yoghurt and yoghurt drinks
- Crackers and rice cakes with bananas and/or honey
- Mini-pancakes, fruit buns, Cereal bars, fruit bars

We hope you found this pack helpful and wish swimmers the best of luck! Should you have any questions or queries please email them to Gemma Scrivener at bbf.pressofficer@gmail.com .