

Gala Advice For Parents.

If this is your child's first gala then there's a few things you might want to know

The athlete (formerly known as your son/daughter/nephew/niece) will have come home from a training-session at the pool and told you the date of the gala and given you an entry form and hopefully you will have chosen to make the most of the opportunity & entered them in a gala - otherwise what is all of the training for? Closer to the day the athlete will have been given their event-cards, if that is the system for that gala. (These have to be handed-in at the pool - usually in a box in the entrance hall, with the event-number on it.), or there will be a confirmation slip or a notice on a website. CHECK THE ENTRIES!

Your most important job on the day of the meet is to make sure that the athlete gets an early night before the gala and arrives at the pool in plenty of time. If it is a gala with an event-card system it is your job to make sure that they are there to drop their cards in before the deadline for that session. There is usually a morning and an afternoon deadline. Make sure the athlete has their club tee-shirt, costume and a spare costume, goggles, spare goggles, spare goggle-straps oh and then you have to be seen to be cheering, taking photos (remember spare batteries, memory sticks or film and sign child-protection form), and worrying. Sorting out the lunch is also in the job-description!

It is not your job to pack their bag, merely to check that it is done. From the earliest stages get the swimmer to pack their own bag and sort their own equipment. They are perfectly capable of doing this. This is important as they must learn to take charge of their swimming as soon as possible. Also if they pack their stuff they are less likely to forget it, a lost tee-shirt and pair of goggles adding up to nearly £20 per competition will be hard for you to sustain.

Punctual delivery of the swimmer (and the card for registration if they are used), is your most important job for the day. If you arrive after the boxes or registration desks are closed that's it. The dash from home has been a waste of time and you are in deep-trouble with the athlete.

Definitely have a good look at the map, timetables and instructions the night before so you know where you are going. Make sure you know which session the athlete's events are in. Set the alarm-clock and leave home in plenty of time so that the

athlete (and you) can remain calm. Please remember that that method of driving faster when lost and blaming everyone else for the confusion fools no one AND rattles the swimmer.

Galas can take absolutely ages! And the races are all over pretty quickly. Be sure you don't miss it by an inappropriate moment for the loo, coffee or a snooze! Depending on how many competitors there are in an event there can be a lot of heats. It can be a long day so it's a good idea to try and share the load if you and another family have athletes competing across the day, you can share the morning out and evening back.

What's the food like? Great if you can survive on crisps, twix, Red Bull and chips - and the usual leisure-centre fare. It's better to get a good packed-lunch in a picnic-bag and take loads of water and favourite juices so that you can eat what you want, when you want.

There may also be shops - swimwear-retailers will usually have a stall - there can be bargains on previous-year costumes and goggles and some fundraising events by the host club.

It can be very hot in the spectator galleries! Make sure you wear comfortable, 'peelable' layers and at some pools you need to be there early to get the best seats (or any at all!). Parking can be a problem in some places too. Ask the more experienced parents for the 'low-down' on the particular pool you are going there.

Mutual-support is the order of the day. The coach and assistants will play a key role on the poolside and the athletes are expected to support each other. As parents you'll probably have little direct contact with your athlete as being poolside is restricted to teams and team-managers but support from the viewing gallery will be appreciated and expected (not just for your own offspring but for other club swimmers)!

Remember you are the parent/carer of the swimmer, you are NOT the coach. Hopefully they might have won a medal, but even if they have not, the swimmer may have set a new PB, worked on a new technique and had a wonderful time. Be supportive, make sure the swimmer talks to the coach who will give them constructive feedback and try not to offer any opinions that dismiss the superhuman physical and psychological effort that your hero has just performed. Remember they have performed it despite growing up, studying, getting bigger, getting smarter, working out how the world works, and putting up with that driver in the car in the morning going too fast and shouting while lost.



Advice for Swimming Galas

Going to a meet

There is no substitute for sleep and you need it before competition. Many of your friends, especially non-competitive types, will arrange awake-overs on Friday nights - avoid these and get your head down. If you are daft enough to go then, at the gala, when you are feeling drowsy and dazed and swimming like a lemon, you will know why. Get home from training on Friday and eat a big bowl of pasta, rice or potatoes, relax a bit and then head for bed. What's the point in training for perfection for months and then crocking your body the night before so that you can only disappoint yourself and let down your family and team-mates.

Ensure you have checked your meet information before the day. It is important to note the time of each session, card posting time (if they are being used), and the location of the pool.

Allow plenty of time to arrive early, this avoids additional stress at a time when you are already anxious about your swims. You should arrive at least 15 minutes prior to your scheduled warm up.

Post your entry cards (if they are being used) before you get changed.

Change in to your warm up costume and pool side clothing - make sure you are wearing City of Bradford Club kit.

Report to the Coach to let him/ her know they have arrived.

Make the most of what in most cases is limited and possibly crowded warm up time. You should warm-up on the poolside as well as in the water. Be ready to start your pool warm up on time. You will find it difficult to do too much or swim hard enough in a warm up.

Warming Up

This helps you to get ready physiologically and mentally for competition and has many benefits:

- The circulatory system is geared up;
- Blood delivery to the muscles increases, they get more oxygen and their metabolism increases;
- Warming up increases the flexibility of joints and internal resistance of muscles decreases: range of motion gets better;
- Warmed muscles contract quicker and more forcefully, on the other hand warmed muscles can relax much better;
- Hormone levels adapt to make energy reserves accessible;
- Muscle strain, injury of connective tissue or cartilage become more unlikely.

Use warm-ups to learn the pool; this is your opportunity to study the marks and crosses on the bottom of the pool and how they relate to the walls, how the turns look as you approach the walls, how the touch-pads affect your grip for turning, what your stroke count is in THIS POOL from the flags into the wall.

At the same time you can become accustomed to the surroundings and mentally prepare for the competition. Some swimmers go through a mental rehearsal of their race when warming up, at a lower pace and only part of the distance, of course.

Example of a warm-up

- Start with a land warm up. Dress warmly; you have to be warm when you enter the pool. Loosen your shoulders, hips, lumbar spine and ankles carefully with dynamic stretching. Don't push, e.g. when circling your arms.
- Swim for 10 to 20 minutes, different strokes, including some drills.
- For distance events (400/800/1500 free, 400 IM) swimmers need to be doing a maximum of 3x50m at that event goal pace to a turn. This is to prepare the muscles and cardio vascular system for the stresses endured during the specific event.
- Depending on the distance: Practise no more than 3 starts and a few sprints (not more than 25 metres). Practise turns.
- Swim down for 5 minutes (approx).
- Stop swimming 20 minutes before the race at the latest.
- Spend approx 10 mins doing a very light warm up after you leave the water.
- If you have along wait between warm up and your first race, if possible, see if you can warm up again before marshalling (perhaps in the 'swim down' pool. Check with your coach first.
- When you go round for marshalling you need to perform some fast movement exercises to keep the blood moving.

Remember to check our website; www.cobsc.co.uk on a regular basis for gala entry information, news & updates

You should have the following items with you when you go to a gala:

- complete club kit with at least one tee shirt
- swim trunks/ costumes (warm up costume/s, racing costume/s, spare
- very clean trainers/ shoes for the pool-side
- two pairs of goggles
- two swimming hats (1 Club, 1 spare)
- towel /s
- Lots of drink (not fizzy!). Remember you might be there for a very long time in a very hot environment and working hard at times. If you get dehydrated you will not swim well.
- something to help you relax (CD/cassette, MP3 players, DS/ Gameboy, magazine, book) but make sure that there is somewhere safe to put any valuable equipment when you are swimming etc.
- boiled sweets, dried fruit, banana, healthy snacks etc.
- sense of fun and a positive attitude to being part of a great club; striving to be the best YOU can be

and goggles, spare COB hat and goggles. Goggles that are properly adjusted? Water bottle/s?

When going to the marshalling-area put your goggles on your head or push them down around your neck. If you are carrying them it is possible that you will put them down or get in a tizzy at the last minute. It will stop you chewing and biting them - goggles always snap in the marshalling area never in the pool - now why would that be? Have your swim-cap on in plenty of time. Lads tie your costumes up tight - double-knot!

Remember you have come to give of your best and be proud of your efforts.

When you actually get to the big meet, your technique may be on auto-pilot, but there are still a number of things that you should think about to help you perform at your very best:

- Starts - Starting blocks differ from pool to pool, so make sure you are comfortable with getting set on the block and with how you feel coming off of it.
- Turns - Just like with starting blocks, the walls might be slightly different from what you're used to. They might be more or less slippery or have higher, lower or no gutter to grab onto. Make sure you practice racing some turns in warm-up.
- Finishes - Don't underestimate your finishing technique. A poor finish can easily cost you a few tenths of a second and maybe the race, so make sure you finish well. Your head should be down (don't lift your head up early), race all the way to the wall and extend your arm as much as possible.

After your swim you must go to your coach for a race debrief and feedback. Know your PB and look for ways to improve everything you do.

Swim down until your heart rate is below 100. Cooling down will make a huge difference in your body's ability to recover for future races.

We are told that for 20 minutes after activity like a race our bodies use any sugar we take and send it



not to our stomach but straight to our muscles ready for more activity. When you get out of the water after a race that race is over, done, history - learn and move on. Your job is now to prepare your body for the next race;

have a drink, have some sugar like a sweet, fruit, dates, apricots - all low volume - high sugar - NO BUNS. Keep your body warm and ready through flexing and stretching.

Often there are hours in between events. What you do during this time makes a big difference to your performance. The best advice is to do what helps you relax. Bring your favorite music to allow you to block out any outside interference, visualize your race--but avoid overkill, bring a book to read. etc. Stay off your feet. Time your routine so there will be several things to do before you race

Check to see if you have made a final (if there are any) before you leave the pool.

If you leave pool side for any reason you must inform the team staff.

Swimmers must wear team colours at all times when they are pool side, track suits must be worn when going for presentation, for which you must be ready.

At all meets, when we sit together as a team and encourage our teammates, we are bound to perform well. When we sit together, the coach can

make sure you are at the right place at the right time. He shouldn't have to look for you

Rowdy behaviour distracts you from concentrating and preparing to do your best. If you are noisy or talking loudly at the start of races swimmers can be distracted and the officials will not be happy - the club may even be told off. Do not play with other swimmers property, do not play practical jokes on people. Highly-motivated and focussed athletes preparing themselves to fly down a pool do not always have their usual sense of humour.

When you leave pool side make sure you have got all your clothing, costumes etc. Also remove any rubbish you may have dropped and leave the team area clean and tidy

Keep in mind that a pre-race meal affects your performance. You should NOT change your eating habits drastically on the day you have a gala. You should however avoid certain foods which tend to upset your stomach or cause discomfort. It is a good policy to finish eating a moderate-sized meal at least 2 1/2 to 3 hours before competing, if you are in a morning session, eat something which is light on the stomach and what you enjoy.

Morning sessions are the toughest from this point of view - anyone can eat a bowl of pasta or couscous at lunchtime but you have to get things you like such as porridge, lots of jam toast, cereal and juices or whatever in at breakfast. This goes for whatever time it is - you may have to drive 40 miles for an 08.15 warm-up so it might be very early. Picky eaters or swimmers who don't just get the fuel in and think they can perform are kidding themselves. You may enjoy the parental "pleading breakfast dance" but it is time for YOU to get on with getting prepared for action without fuss. This isn't about what YOU LIKE it is about what YOU NEED.

you more nervous, but it will distract you from concentrating on what's important: your stroke and what you are doing in *your* lane. Remember, to swim fast at meets, you have to leave your time and place goals at home and focus on what *you* are doing in the water.

Ignore 90% of what you hear said in the changing rooms and marshalling area. Every competitive swimmer has heard questions like "What time do you do?" or "How many sessions a week do you swim?" etc in the marshalling area.

Would you like to know a little secret? Most of it is 100% pure rubbish. The swimmers who try this cheap attempt at "psyching out" are usually the ones who have not prepared for the meet themselves and are looking to make up for their poor preparation by making you feel less confident. Do not listen to them. Or have a clever answer for them. If you get asked "What's your best time", answer "I'll tell you after this race".

YOU pack your bag

Pack your own bag, YOU are the athlete, YOU need to know what YOU have with YOU and where it is. YOU need what is in it. YOU have worked and trained hard to get here and your parents or carers have worked hard to get YOU to training. Who are YOU now to sit back and have them wait on YOU. It's time for YOU to start sorting out stuff for YOU. The first step to controlling your own swimming as YOU move into competition is YOU packing your own kit. YOU need it, YOU use it, YOU pack it.

Mental Preparation

There are a lot of reasons why swimmers regularly freeze up at meets. Probably the main reason for swimming slowly under pressure is having the wrong focus of concentration both *before* and *during* your races.

If you go into your meets and races with an "outcome focus," that is, you're worried about breaking a certain time or beating a particular opponent, then chances are very good that you'll freeze up and swim way below your potential. There are two reasons for this: First, focusing on your time or an opponent *before* a race will get you too nervous and too tight physically to swim fast. One of the keys to swimming fast when it counts the most is staying loose and relaxed pre-race. Second, focusing on your time or where an opponent is *during* your races will not only make