

Parents' Guide to Away Galas



Introduction

An Away Gala is simply a gala that COSSC will enter into that isn't being held at one of Salford's swimming pools. It isn't compulsory to take part however, as an ASA affiliated competitive swimming club we expect most swimmers to compete regularly. If your child wishes to progress and swim competitively then the away galas are the perfect opportunity to gain invaluable experience swimming against other clubs at other venues.

This guide has been put together to explain as much as possible.

Type of Away Galas

The vast majority of the galas we go to are licensed by the ASA as a Level 1, Level 2, Level 3 or Level 4 Meet. This mainly refers to the level of judging at a particular gala however, as a rule of thumb a Level 3 or 4 gala will have easier entry times than a Level 2 or 1 gala. These galas are therefore more suitable for younger swimmers who are just starting to attend galas. Unless your child is an exceptional swimmer you will find that the majority of galas you attend will initially be level 4 or level 3.

Level 4

Level 4 Meets are intended for either Novice events or Club Championships. These times are eligible for County qualification.

Level 3

Level 3 Meets require Upper limit times and qualifying times and can attract a wide spectrum of swimmers. The qualifying times can vary widely from times which are equivalent to County qualifying times to those which can enable inexperienced swimmers to compete. The majority of Level 3 meets are held in a 25m pool (short course).

Level 1 and 2

Level 1 and 2 Meets must have a minimum set of qualifying standards. No upper limit time is required. They are aimed at higher level swimmers such as National and Regional qualifiers and the better County Level swimmers. If these galas are oversubscribed, slower swimmers may be told that they can no longer swim. All Level 1 meets are held in a long course (50m) pool. Level 2 are 25m pool (short course).

All times recorded in a licensed meet will be shown on the ASA database. This database is open for everyone to see and you can look at your child's individual times. Check out www.swimmingresults.org and go to Individual Times, enter your child's ASA number and take a

look. The website will show you the time, date and venue where it was achieved. Membership to the ASA is required annually and an email is sent from the club to remind parents' to complete the renewal each year. Remember without ASA membership your child is unable to swim. Keep a record of their ASA number as you will need to quote it on all gala entries.

Notification and Entry Pack

In the first instance all galas are communicated by email (address given to the club when your child becomes a member). The email will contain an attachment with all the information required to submit your child's entry. If you change your email address then please notify the club of the change by emailing your child's coach, failure to do this will result in you missing out on notifications.

The information will also be uploaded to our website www.cityofsalfordsc.co.uk where you will be able to download the entry pack. Some information on the website is available for anyone to view under 'Events', however to enter the gala you will need the Gala Password which will have been emailed with the Gala information.

When entering, check you enter your child in the correct age category as it can vary to be either "age on the day" of the gala or "age at the 31st December".

All races will also have some form of qualifying times and you will find these in the information pack. Take care to establish what time you are to write on the entry form. Some events require official ASA registered times, some go even further and state the timeframe in which the time had to be achieved. Others are more relaxed and a training time is acceptable. If you are unsure of what training time to write then ask their coach for a suitable time. Those that will allow a training time are great opportunity for your child to swim a race they haven't swam before and record an official time.

The information pack will quote a Lower qualifying time (LQT) is the slowest speed you are eligible to enter the race at, Upper Qualifying Time (UQT) is the fastest speed you can enter. Do not enter a swimmer for a meet if they have not gained the qualifying time or are too fast, you may lose your money.

The promoters conditions will say if you need to submit "short course" or SC (i.e. achieved in a 25m pool) or "long course" (LC – achieved in a 50m pool) entry times. For most SC galas, SC times are needed, but please check. If you are asked for long course times and your child has not experienced swimming in a 50m pool, or they don't have times for a particular event then you can still submit an entry. You can simply convert their short course times into a long course equivalent and enter those on the entry form. To convert times SC to LC and vice versa then look at www2.sportsys.co.uk or www.pullbuoy.co.uk/times/ and these websites will convert the times for you.

Decide with your child what events you would like them to enter, it is not recommended that you enter your child for everything, they will just get too tired and will not perform their best. If you are unsure then ask your child's coach who will be happy to advise you. Once you have decided on the events and have checked the entry requirement then complete the COSSC online entry form (not the host's). Please be careful when completing the form as any errors may result in your child missing out on entering the gala. We deal with a large number of entries and it takes a lot of time for the

information to be uploaded and our entry submitted. It is important our entries are correct if we are to ensure acceptance.

We cannot usually accept any late entries or payments as open meets have a closing date which you must adhere to.

Acceptance into a meet is not guaranteed once you have submitted your child's entry. The club will be notified shortly after submitting our entries if we are successful or not. Some galas are extremely popular and operate on a first come first serve basis and sometimes we can be rejected from events.

If you are attending a gala over two days and would prefer to book an overnight stay rather than travel home, we do not recommend that you book any overnight accommodation until we receive notification that the club has been accepted into the gala. If you do then you may not be able to get a refund.

Club Kit

Anyone representing COSSC is expected to wear the club kit. To obtain kit please contact Nicky Bottomley or Sue Lee at clubkit@cityofsalfordsc.co.uk

Some stock is available for purchase at home galas and this is great opportunity to see samples and check out sizes before you place an order.

Preparation – equipment, food and drink

Swimmers should be encouraged to pack their own equipment for meets, including a costume (and a spare), racing costume (if required), COS hat, two pairs of goggles, pool shoes, two towels, COS t-shirt, COS tracksuit (or a pair of shorts/tracksuit bottoms), a change of clothes for after the competition, plenty of drinks (normally water), and healthy snacks (cereal/energy bars, rice cakes, fruit and raw vegetables etc). Swimmers should avoid eating junk food on the poolside (crisps, chocolate, sweets etc) – this is not preparing properly.

Dealing with nerves

If you are new to competing it's very likely that you'll be nervous. All swimmers get nervous – from the youngest up to our internationally experienced squad members. Nerves are not a bad thing, and often help swimmers prepare for a race. The really important thing is not to let the nerves take over, and turn into fear. Keep busy and active, and don't spend time thinking about your race until the very last few minutes. Enjoy the challenge, and just try to be the best you can be.

Arrival

Swimmers should be well rested – so going to bed early the night before is a very good idea. They should also be nutritionally well-prepared and hydrated – travelling causes a great deal of dehydration so make sure that you are sipping water all through your journey.

Swimmers should know what races they are competing in, and make themselves familiar with the programme BEFORE the event, so that they are aware of how the day will unfold. As parents should

have checked the draft programme to make sure the swimmer appears in the events entered, this should be straightforward.

Meets start early, so if you are due at the first session set two alarm clocks then you won't oversleep (or lie awake worrying that you might!). If the meet is not held in Salford, make sure that you know the route, leave plenty of time for the journey and arrive at the time set by the coach – this will normally be at least 30 minutes before the start of the pool warm-up session. This may seem early, but this time is very important for swimmers to prepare properly and avoid rushing.

Make sure you know where the venue is and allow plenty of time to get there, remember the venue isn't always the club's home pool and parking can sometime be difficult. Swimmers can usually go straight into the changing rooms, only parents and other spectators need to queue and pay. The team always meet changed and at poolside, not at the entrance, get your child to look out for other swimmers from the club as well as the Team Manager.

Meet types

Most meets use start sheets, to allow swimmers to know what heat/lane they are in. Sometimes, however, swimmers are required to register on arrival. The coaches will know the format and will provide guidance. Any withdrawals on the day must be discussed with the coach immediately upon arrival at the meet, and then made according to meet procedure. Parents are responsible for withdrawals if the swimmer is not attending the meet.

Warm-up

Proper warm-ups are essential and are intended to protect from injury and improve the swimmer's performance at the meet by increasing body temperature, heart rate, blood pressure and energy producing enzyme activity. They also give swimmers the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the diving blocks, water temperature and depths, position of the turn flags and feel of the end walls. Warm-ups are strictly organised and swimmers must follow the instructions of the COS coaches and the meet officials. When instructed to leave the pool, swimmers should immediately dry off, take a loo break if necessary, change into their racing costume (sometimes called skinning-up!), t-shirt and track pants, and keep warm. Swimmers should not warm up in a racing suit, as it defeats the purpose of the fabric and will reduce the costume lifespan. Swimmers should remain on poolside with their team mates throughout the meet session, which build team building and team spirit. If a swimmer should need to leave the poolside they should always seek the permission of their coach or team manager. **Due to child welfare regulations, under no circumstances are parents to come onto poolside, unless sanctioned to do so.**

Race preparation

Prior to racing, swimmers should listen carefully to any instruction from their coach. Swimmers must also listen out for instructions to report to poolside stewards who are the officials responsible for gathering swimmers together and organising them into the correct heats and lanes. The stewards will check you off and tell you which heat and lane you are swimming in.

It is the swimmer's responsibility to report to the steward for their event. As meets are run to very tight schedules, the stewards and referees are not obliged to wait for a swimmer to arrive for their heat or to fit them into a later heat if they miss their designated heat.

Race starts for beginners

Competitors should leave their tracksuits, t-shirts etc, on until just before a race. When approaching the starting blocks take care not to walk in front of the officials who may be checking the finish of a race, observing the turns or starting the preceding heat. It's a good idea to put on your hat and prepare your goggles just before the steward sends you to the blocks. Most top swimmers will also carry some spare goggles with them, in case they break! Once you get there, you should take your warm clothing off and put them on the chair or in the box if there's one provided. The referee blows a short series of whistles to signal that the swimmers should stand behind the starting block, and everyone else should be quiet.

When the referee blows a long blast on the whistle you should either: stand on the block, stand near the edge of the pool if you are starting in the water, or drop into the water if it is a backstroke race. It does not matter where on the block you stand but when the starter gives the command, "Take your marks", you must quickly take up a position with at least one foot at the front of the block with your toes wrapped over the edge and remain completely still, until the starting signal is given. Ensure you know what that signal is – it could be a starting gun bang, a whistle or an electronic beep. If a swimmer starts before, or is moving at the time the signal is given, and are deemed to have started before the start signal. **A "one start rule" is applied, which means swimmers do not have a second chance - they are immediately disqualified (DQ'd).**

At the end of a race swimmers must remain in the water until asked to leave by an official, usually the referee.

Disqualification

Swimmers can be disqualified for a number of reasons, including: delaying the start, making a false start, faulty turn, faulty stroke, faulty finish, or leaving the water before being told to do so. It helps if swimmers know the basic rules. If you are disqualified don't be too upset. It happens to everyone at some point, even world champions! Find out why you were DQ'd, discuss it with your coach, and try not to make the same mistake again. Swimmers who are DQ'd do not have a time recorded for their swim.

Swim-down

At some events, particularly level 1 and 2 meets, there will be swim down facilities. A swim down is to allow the swimmer's body to recover after the race by helping to reduce lactic acid build up in the muscles - a build of lactic acid can cause muscle stiffness and tiredness – which will help swimmers to perform well later in the meet. The coach will advise you on what to swim in the swim-down – you should make sure you stick to the programme. Older swimmers can feel stiff and sore for a day or so after a big weekend of competing – swimming down helps the body to recover and feel less tired.

Finals

Some or all events, especially the longer ones, may be heat declared (with results based solely on times achieved in the heats) but others have finals, with the fastest swimmers from the heats going forward. Finals are normally held at the end of the session, but do check. Swimmers are spearheaded, with the fastest swimmers in the centre lanes and the slowest in the outside lanes. In a 10-lane pool the swimmers will occupy the lanes as follows: 4,5,3,6,2,7,1,8,0,9 in fastest to slowest order.

Viewing the Results

On the day print outs of all the results will be posted on the walls around the venue and in the changing area. Shortly afterwards they will be available to view on the host's website and on the ASA website. Some meets will post results live on their website after each event.

Awards

In most competitions, medals, trophies, and sometimes ribbons are awarded on the day to the top three or six swimmers in each event. Results are posted on the wall and there is usually an awards table. If a swimmer is unable to collect a medal due to leaving early, ask someone to get it on their behalf if possible.

Once your child has competed in several galas and is generally improving as a swimmer they can work towards swimming at a higher level. Please refer to the "Qualifying Times" section in the Members section of the website for details on the Lancashire County Championships, Regional and National Championships.

After the event

Congratulations, a good job done! When you've finished your swim, collect your warm clothes and go to see your coach for feedback about your swim. Discussion and analysis will help you to improve your technique and race tactics. If you feel you've had a bad race, find out if your coach agrees (they may not) and if so, why; learn from the experience, stay positive, and move on. Depending on facilities and when your next event is, you may be told to swim down, or to dry off and get your warm clothes back on.

The key thing for younger swimmers is to enjoy racing, practise and improve their stroke technique, learn racing skills, listen to their coach and give 100% - At COS we say 'Leave everything in the Pool' – which means give the race all your effort that you can give.

Advice for parents new to COS

Preparation is everything. Get everything possible ready the night before. Most take a cool bag with a large supply of drinks, snacks and healthy high carbohydrate lunch items – your coach will give you appropriate advice. Don't rely on suitable food being available at the venue – very few pools, if any, have excellent catering facilities! If there is food available, there can often be a huge queue and then you'll have difficulty finding a seat. Take a pen to record times/splits etc, and something (a book, an MP3 player/tablet, newspaper) to occupy you – there can be long waits between events. Pools get very hot and humid so dress appropriately.

Watching your child compete is exciting but it can also be nerve-wracking, and everyone reacts to the situation differently. Once the race is underway some parents shout hysterically, much to the amusement of other parents, officials and swimmers! Enthusiasm is great, but your child won't be able to hear you and is likely to thank you more if you stay calm. Give them a reassuring hug and wish them luck prior to the meet, but please **don't offer technical or coaching advice – leave this to the professional coaching staff.**

Glossary

AGE AT: Recently most meets have moved to grouping swimmers according to their age at the end of the year, i.e. 31 December. This is in line with the major swimming competitions such as Nationals. However, some promoters still run their events according to your age on the day of the race

AGE GROUP: Division of swimmers according to age, usually in one or two year bands

ASA: Amateur Swimming Association, the governing body of British swimming

ASA NUMBER: A unique reference number that you will be provided with when joining a swimming club and asked to provide when entering galas

BACK UP TIME: The time given to a swimmer when they fail to stop the electronic timing by hitting the timing pad hard enough or the pad fails to record a time. The backup time is initiated by the time keeper pressing a button as soon as the swimmer finishes the race

BAGCATS: British Age Group Categories are a point-based system operated by the ASA. Their objective is to encourage development across multiple strokes and distances for girls under 14 and boys under 15 and to discourage specialisation at too early a stage in a swimmer's career

BLOCKS: The starting platforms which are located behind each lane

BRITISH RANKINGS: this is a database maintained by British Swimming which records all times of all swimmers at licensed meets. You can see all your own PBs as well as looking at how you rank against others at County, Regional or National level

CLOSING DATE: The last date when entries into a competition have to be received by the club in order to send them to the Meet Organiser. Entries will not be accepted after the closing date

CONVERTED TIME: normally for meets you will be asked to provide either a LC or SC time (see below). For most (but not all) meets you are allowed to use a converted time which means using official conversion tables to switch times e.g. from a race swum in a 25m pool to an equivalent time for a 50m pool. NB 50m times are slower because of the lack of turns. Use the Pull buoy website converter to help you work out your times.

COURSE: The length of pool: Long Course (LC) = 50 metres / Short Course (SC) = 25 metres

DNF: Did Not Finish - you will see this against the results of a swimmer who fails to complete a race

DNS: Did Not Start - you will see this against the results of a swimmer who fails to start a race

DQ: Disqualified - it happens!

ELECTRONIC TIMING: A timing system that is operated electronically which normally has touch pads in the water that hook up to a computer and records the swimmers split and finish times when they touch the pad

ELIGIBLE TO COMPETE: The status of a member swimmer that means they are registered with the ASA and have met all the entry requirements

ENTRY FEES: The amount per event a swimmer or relay is charged. This varies depending on the type of meet

ENTRY LIMIT: Normally meets have a maximum number of swimmers they can accept for each race

EVENT: A race

FINA: Federation Internationale de National de Amateur, the international governing body of competitive swimming, diving, water polo and synchronized swimming

FALSE START: When a swimmer leaves the starting block or moves on the block before the starter has started the race. The swimmer will be disqualified for making a false start

FAULTY START: When a swimmer or swimmers leave the starting block because of an error of an official or failure of the starting equipment

HEAT DECLARED WINNER (HDW): open meets will normally be run on an HDW basis which means that only heats are swum, not heats and finals. Swimmers are put in heats according to entry time which means you get a mix of age groups swimming in the same heat. The winner is the swimmer in the relevant category, usually age, with the fastest time over all of the heats, not the winner of a particular heat. A headache for spectators wanting to know the result because you have to identify all the swimmers in a particular age category and note all their times before you know how well your swimmer has done (barring disqualifications)!

HYTEK: you will see reference to Hytek on the website in various places and often in relation to competitions. It is an official database, maintained by the club, which records your times

LICENSED MEET: in order for race times to be official and recognised by British Swimming, they must be swum at a licensed meet. There are four levels of meet with level 1 being the highest. The qualification for higher level meets will be harder and aimed at higher level swimmers

MEET MOBILE: a useful app that provides real time results at selected galas

OT OFFICIAL TIME: The swimmers event time recorded to one hundredth of a second (.01)

OFFICIALS: these are the people in white you see poolside at galas. They are all qualified and registered officials who are there to make sure that swimmers abide by the official rules. Open meets are dependent on having a certain number of officials to meet their license so if you want to support your swimmer this is a great way to get involved

OPEN COMPETITION: Meet Competition which any qualified club, organisation, or individual may enter

OVER THE TOP START: At some meets and galas for Front Crawl (Freestyle), Breaststroke and Butterfly races to save time the swimmers will remain in the water after their event until the next race starts.

PERSONAL BEST (PB) - The best time a swimmer has done so far in each stroke and distance

QUALIFICATION TIME (QT) - often the conditions of a meet will require you to have swum a minimum (and occasionally maximum) time at a licensed meet in order to qualify

SIGN IN: most meets will require you to arrive by a certain time to sign in for your events. If you miss this you won't be able to swim

WITHDRAWAL/SIGN OUT: some meets will have a withdrawal system rather than a sign in. This means you need to let the organisers know if you are NOT swimming - sometimes there are financial penalties for not advising them so keep on top of this!