

Gala advice for new swimmers

Shrewsbury ASC encourages all swimmers to enter selected competitions each season. The swimming gala, or “meet” as it can be known, can seem like a daunting and confusing prospect for swimmers and their parents who may be new to swimming. However, once you’ve experienced a couple, you will quickly get into the swing of things, and there is always help at hand. Your Head Coach and Team Managers are there to help with matters relating to meets and, as with every other aspect of the club’s activities, there are plenty people, some with years of experience, who’ll be happy to advise you.

The Meet Calendar

The meet calendar for the season is published on the club’s website and emailed to all members. It may be subject to change throughout the course of the season, but members will be kept informed. Not all meets are suitable for all squads/swimmers and it’s the coach’s decision as to who should enter what.

Competition Types

Competitions are targeted at different standards of swimmer and are designated one of four levels.

- Level 1 Meets are long course (50m pool) only and cover National, Regional and County Championships. Their purpose is to enable swimmers to achieve qualifying times for entry into National, Regional and County Championships.
- Level 2 Meets are short course (25m pool) only and cover National, Regional and County Championships. Their purpose is to enable swimmers to achieve qualifying times for entry into National, Regional and County Championships in short course.
- Level 3 Meets are long and short (50m or 25m pools) course events. Their purpose is to enable swimmers to achieve times for entry into Regional and County Championships and other Meets at Level 1 or Level 2.
- Level 4 Meets are entry level events in pools 25m or greater. Club Championships are an example. They are for inexperienced swimmers seeking to compete outside their club environment. If times are good athletes progress to Level 3 Meets.

Swimmers compete individually and as a team where usually awards are given for those finishing in the top 3. Sometimes there are overall competition awards for the top male and female swimmers, and an award for the top club.

There are also team competitions, such as “Arena” as it’s known. It’s actually the National Swimming League which is currently sponsored by Arena. This consists of a set programme of events, normally including relays. The Coaches will select the team. Each swim will earn points depending upon finish position, and the team with the most points at the end wins. The club will normally travel together as a team on a coach for Arena meets which are held over three evenings, one in October, one in November and one in December. For other galas, families travel independently.

Entry Forms

Entry forms for competitions will be given to swimmers or can usually be downloaded from the club’s website. They should be returned as requested and always by the deadline, normally shown on the form. Payment should be online to the club where possible, quoting swimmer’s name and meet as the reference, or by cheque made payable to Shrewsbury ASC and put in a sealed envelope with the entry form.

If you need help completing entry forms, the coach will advise on what events they feel the swimmer should enter. Please try to provide all the information asked for on the form. This will save someone else having to look it all up later! Collating all the club entries is a mammoth task and the timescales are tight. If the overall club entry is delayed there is a significant risk that the club’s entries will all be rejected from a meet, which would have a major impact on the coaching plan because the competition calendar is designed to complement the training season.

Personal Best Times, or PBs as they're known.

Swimmers are responsible for keeping a record of times they achieve for the events they swim in competitions. Their fastest times are referred to as Personal Bests, or PBs. Coaches have records of these but given the number of swimmers involved, it's better the swimmer knows them too.

All personal best times can be found on the Swim England (ASA) website, on the link from the club website.

Time Conversions

Some meets require times achieved in a 25m (short course) pool and others in a 50m (long course) pool. There are tools available to convert between the two. Traditional comparative performance tables are accessible on the British Swimming website. There are also online conversion tools, such as pullbuoy.co.uk

Qualifying Times

Meet requirements usually include qualifying times and sometimes a separate list of slower consideration times. If qualifying times are stipulated, only swimmers who have achieved those times or faster are able to enter that event. Even then they are not guaranteed entry. If the meet is oversubscribed, swimmers with the slower entry times may be rejected or "scratched" from that event. Those entering with consideration times have to wait and see whether their entries are accepted or rejected. Lists of scratched entries are usually available on the relevant organisation's website, and the swimmer's coach will be informed in advance of the meet. The fee for a scratched entry is refunded via the Competition Secretary. Sometimes there is an upper time limit as well as a lower limit to prevent higher standard swimmers from entering lower level competitions.

Age Groups

Most competitions will organise swimmers into age groups for awards. Sometimes these are single year age groups, sometimes double, with awards presented for the top swimmers in each event in each age group.

Competitions can be run as "Age on Day" or Age at 31st December. Age on Day means that the swimmer enters as their age on the final day of competition. Age at 31st December means the swimmer enters as the age they will be on 31st December of that year.

Meet Programmes

Meet programmes are normally available for sale at the venue, listing all swimmers in each event in order of seed time, and providing general information about the event. They are very useful if only to work out when your child is likely to be swimming and schedule comfort breaks and trips to the café accordingly!

Results

Electronic timing is used at most meets. Timekeepers provide backup should the electronics go wrong. The results of each race will be shown on the display board, but they have to be ratified by the referee and declared so by the announcer before they are deemed "official". There may be disqualifications for the infraction of technical or stroke rules, or the electronic timing may not have been operating correctly (e.g. a swimmer may not have touched the pad hard enough to trigger it). Official results are usually posted on the walls after the events, and are often available on the host club or organisation's website within a couple of days. Shrewsbury ASC also posts the results on its own website.

National Rankings

All the results from licensed meets are forwarded to British Swimming which maintains the Swim England (ASA) National Rankings Database. This can be accessed on the British Swimming website. It ranks each swimmer in all the age groups, for each stroke and distance, for long course and short course.

Club Records & Rankings

Club competition records and swimmer rankings for each event are maintained by either the Head Coach or Gala Secretary. They are updated periodically from the meet results.