

Top tips for Novice Gala

Be Prepared – equipment, food and drink

Swimmers are encouraged to pack their own equipment for galas and swim meets, including a costume (and a spare), swim hat, two pairs of goggles, two towels, LOBSC poolside kit (or a loose t-shirt and pair of shorts), a change of clothes for after the competition, plenty of drinks (normally water), and some healthy snacks (cereal/energy bars, rice cakes, fruit and raw vegetables etc). See our “Good Grub Guide” for diet advice for swimmers. Swimmers are discouraged from eating junk food on the poolside (crisps, chocolate, sweets etc).

On 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 again our “Good Grub Guide” will give you advice on what should be consumed.

Swimmers should know what races they are competing in, please remember to keep a record of your gala entries and check the programme on arrival to make sure there are no issues. Expecting to swim events that they have not actually been entered for and likewise finding out they are due to swim in an event they were not expecting to causes unnecessary upset for the swimmers.

For the LOBSC novice gala we normally expect swimmers to arrive at least 20 minutes before the advertised start of the pool warm-up session to allow for getting changed, checking attendance and getting settled in the swimmers holding area (usually the learner pool area at Waterlane). However please note that the queue for spectating often begins to form at least 30 mins before warm up time!

Swimmers will stay with their parents/guardians in the queue (normally in the main sports hall) until they are called through to the changing rooms. When called through the swimmers will be expected to come to the changing rooms without parents. There will be plenty of their peers plus older swimmers to help out with any issues. All bags will be taken onto poolside so there is no need for lockers. As most novice galas are straight after public swim sessions we do ask that the swimmers only enter the changing area once called. Coaches and other officials are around by the pool to help put on hats, adjust goggles and provide any encouragement or advice.

Warm-up

Proper warm-ups are essential and are intended to protect from injury and improve the swimmer’s performance at the gala by increasing body temperature, heart rate, blood pressure etc. They also give swimmers the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the pool set-up, diving blocks, water temperature etc. Warm-ups are strictly organised and swimmers must follow the instructions of the LOBSC coaches

and gala officials who will allocate swimmers to lanes and provide details of the warm up set.

When instructed to leave the pool, swimmers should immediately dry off, and unless in the first few heats they should pop on their t-shirt and shorts, and keep warm. Swimmers should remain on poolside or in the holding area with their team mates throughout the gala, to promote team building and encourage team spirit. If a swimmer should need to leave the poolside they should always seek the permission of their coach or poolside manager.

Due to child welfare regulations, under no circumstances are parents to come into the swimmer's area, 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 from the poolside team managers, who are the officials responsible for gathering swimmers together and organising them into the correct heats and lanes. The team managers 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 team manager for their event. As galas are run to tight schedules, the officials 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 because they have gone off to get their hat or goggles or popped off to the toilet!

Race starts for beginners

Generally several heats will be lined up ready to swim at any one time, there are usually at least one set of chairs set up for the next race competitors to wait on. It's a good idea to ensure you have your hat on and prepare your goggles by the time you reach these chairs as from here the steward will send you to wait behind your starting block.

When approaching the starting blocks please take care not to walk in front of the officials (dressed in all white) who will likely be checking the finish of a race, observing the turns or starting the preceding heat.

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 diving from the side or drop into the water if it is a backstroke race or you intend starting in the water.

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. Usually Novice Gala events start with an electronic beep. If a swimmer starts before, or is moving at the time the signal is given, they will be 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 we practice these all the time in training. 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 and are not eligible for a medal.

After the event

Congratulations, a good job done! When you've finished your swim, dry off and pop on your warm clothes.

The key thing for younger swimmers is to practise and improve their stroke technique and learn racing skills. This may mean that in the short term they need to slow down a little and focus more on getting their technique right. In the longer term, once good technique has become natural to them, they can focus on maximum speed.

Results

All the novice gala events are heat declared (with results based solely on times achieved in the heats) this means that your placement in your individual heat may not reflect your overall placement in the event. The 2 different age categories can also be swum in a single heat so it is not until all heats for an event are completed and any disqualifications have been registered that the outcome of the races are

known. When results have been confirmed correct by the referee a copy will be given to the medal table who will then hand out medals to the 1st, 2nd and 3rd place swimmers for each age category for the event.

Advice for parents new to LOBSC

Don't forget to bring some cash, we charge a small entry fee for spectators to help cover the cost of holding the gala, the printing the programme of events, plus there is usually a raffle on offer. Many of our events help to raise additional funds for the club which allow us to keep the club running. Do remember a pen to record times. Probably also best to dress for a tropical holiday, viewing is usually offered in both the upstairs gallery and from seating on poolside even in winter both places will seem extremely hot when you have been sat there a while.

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 gala, but please don't offer them any technical or tactical advice; Do congratulate them after their swim, and console them if they are disappointed with their performance, but avoid any analysis however well-meant it is. Leave the feedback to the coaches, as any mixed messages will only confuse the swimmer and can cause unnecessary bad feeling.

Enjoy yourself and help your swimmer to appreciate the highs (and occasional lows) of the sport, and explain that sometimes losing, is the best way to learn how to win. Don't expect them to achieve a personal best every time they race.

As always, if you have any questions, please come forward and ask your squad rep or child's coach – someone will be able to help.

All our galas and swim meets are run by volunteers, even if you don't know anything about swimming we always welcome offers of help, there are all sorts of jobs from the handing out refreshments to our officials to selling raffle tickets that do not need any 'swimming knowledge' so if you would like to get involved and help out at this or any future events then please speak to either Mel your squad rep or the coaching staff or contact Kim Turner who is responsible for ensuring we have the required officials and helpers at all our events.