

Parents' Guide for Swimming Events

This guide has been put together to help you and your swimmer understand and prepare for the various swimming events they may be involved in.

The events have been broken down into categories with specifics for each. The last section is a general Q&A with information that applies to most Swimming events.

General advice

As a general rule, young swimmers start by competing over 25m and 50m distances, the 200m and 100m IM distances are then added. At 10 years the 400m events are added and generally only once you are 11 (girls) or 12 (boys) can you compete over 100m distances.

The club will usually try to put your swimmer in a relay race for their first experience of a Gala competition - this helps to control the inevitable 'first race nerves'.

For most events there are no heats or finals, just races (Heat Declared Winners or HDW). Swimmers race against swimmers with similar qualifying times but not necessarily the same age. The times are then recorded for each race and the winner is the quickest swimmer in that age group. Disqualifications are inevitable especially for the younger swimmer and for the more technical strokes. Your swimmer will be disappointed but should be praised for their race effort. In the long run it is better for them to be disqualified in the early stages of their career as they will quickly learn to be competitive. They will have plenty of other opportunities to race again!

Swimming Events can be any of the following-

- 1 **Internal.** These would only be Didcot Barramundi swimmers in the event .
- 2 **Open or Graded Meets.** These are hosted by other swimming clubs and will include swimmers from many clubs. Didcot Barramundi attend these mostly, at present.
- 3 **League Galas.** Swimmers would be selected by the club to swim in these and would be told which event they would be swimming in once they have arrived at poolside. Barramundi is not yet participating in a league.
- 4 **Championships.** These include events such as Counties, South East Regionals (SER), Nationals. These have qualifying times which can be found on the relevant web sites.
- 5 **Swimmers Q&A**
- 6 **Common Terms**

1. Internal Events

.Didcot Barramundi do not hold these at present.

2. Open or Graded Meets

An open meet is very different from other events in several ways, so requires a bit more preparation.

An open meet takes place over a longer period of time than other events, often a whole day or weekend rather than a single evening.

Open meets are generally 'age on the day', so the age your swimmer will be on the last day of the event. Any swimmer who is age 9 or older can enter open meets provided they meet the entry qualification or consideration time for their age.

Open meets are graded with 'B/C' or 'L2/3' meets designed for swimmers who are developing and are not the fastest in their age group.

Level 2/3: These can have upper and lower qualifying times – swimmers must be faster than the lower limit but slower than the upper limit. These meets are usually suitable for children trying to qualify for the county/regional championships as the upper limits are normally set just above the relevant qualification times. This is a good level of competition to start at – assuming your child is not faster than the times published!

Level 1: These are the highest level of meets and only have lower qualification times – i.e. the swimmer must be faster than the entry times shown. These are suitable only for the top swimmers and are aimed at swimmers trying to obtain national times.

For your swimmer, it is a great opportunity to compete in a wide range of strokes/distances against swimmers from many other clubs. It is also a chance to get new 'personal best' times, see how their swimming has improved and where they are seeded amongst the external competition.

Preparing entries

During the course of the year the coach chooses which open meets the Club wishes swimmers to attend based upon the appropriate level of competition. The choice of open meet may be different for different swimmers. Details of the meet, such as the entry form and qualification times, are put on the web site. Several weeks before an open meet your swimmer will receive an entry form with details, date, available events, closing date etc. These details can also usually be found on the host clubs web site.

Open meet events are in 'sessions' with the first session often requiring you to check in by 7:30am and the last session ending in to the evening! Session details can also usually be found on the host clubs web site.

If you are not sure which events to enter, speak to the coach for advice but in general, especially for inexperienced swimmers, it is advisable for the initial open meets, to check which session each swim is in and to choose events that will not involve: a long day, long gaps in between or too many races in one session.

Please *clearly* mark which events you want to enter, with '**race times' and ASA registration number**, & return the form to Fixture's officer with the correct amount of money made payable to Didcot Barramundi Swim Club. You will be asked for a contribution towards the Coach's Pass at a later stage – the amount depends on how many people from the Club have entered.

It is advisable to return the form before the closing date rather than on the very last day, so that any queries can be sorted out early. If you miss the closing date your swimmer will not be able to participate.

Acceptance

Even though your swimmer is inside the consideration or qualifying times their entry may not be accepted if the host club receives too many entrants.

If this is case the host club will reject entries starting with those nearest to the cut off time so check if you were near the qualifying times for that event.

For a card meet, if you have a card missing your swimmer's entry has probably been rejected for that event. For a cardless meet, accepted entries will be posted up the notice board and on the host club web site.

Refunds will be given via Barramundi Club for rejected entries.

Card Meets

About a week before the meet you will usually receive cards from your Fixture's Officer (see later for Cardless meets). They are postcard sized and colour coded blue for boys & pink for girls. The card will show your swimmer's name and date of birth, the stroke, distance and entry time for the event. Check all the cards to ensure that your swimmer has been entered in the correct events and that the information on the cards is correct. Speak to the Fixture's Officer as soon as possible if you think there are any errors.

Make sure you bring the cards with you to the meet and arrive early enough to 'post' them. They must be handed in, or "posted", at a specified time (usually the start time for warm-up) to confirm to the organisers

that your swimmer will be competing. The last posting time, or box closing time, may be printed on the card but if you are not sure, double-check with the coach beforehand, to make sure you get to the pool on time. The 'posting box' is usually on poolside but may be by the entrance to the pool. If you can't find the box – ask either one of the organisers, a coach or even another parent.

Do not panic if you get to the meet and find you have forgotten your cards. Report to the officials before the published box closing time and they will be able to issue replacement cards. **If cards are not posted in time a swimmer runs the risk of not being able to compete.**

Cardless meets

Some meets are cardless so you will not receive the pink and blue cards. You should take your ASA card along as you may be required to present it for identification and proof of ASA membership.

These meets require that your swimmer sign against their name; 'sign in' for each event. As with posting cards, signing in is required by a certain time, usually before the warm up for each session but be aware some meets have a queue to sign in. The signing in sheets are usually found by the changing rooms and have one sheet per event, printed with the entry name in alphabetical order. If you are in more than one event in the session make sure you sign in for all events in that session. Often sheets for later sessions come out during the earlier session so if your swimmer has an event in the later session they can sign in early and avoid the pre warm up rush.

On the day of the Open meet

(See also 'Swimmers Q&A' for general advice)

Warm up is 30 minutes to an hour before the event start and is usually separate for boys / girls and, depending on numbers, the older swimmers will often warm up after the younger ones. There is no diving during the warm up but towards the end of each warm up session, listen for the announcement, some lanes will be dedicated as sprint lanes where swimmers can dive in and sprint one length, getting out at the other end and walking back. The Coach may give your swimmer advice on how much warm up to do and what thing to concentrate on depending on the event they are swimming that day.

When the event starts, announcements will be made calling each event in turn. When the announcement is made for the relevant event your swimmer will be called by the Coach for last minute talk and then sent down to the marshalling or 'Whipping' area.

The younger ones especially will want to wave to you as they go down to the Whipping area and at this point you start to panic they haven't got their goggles, hat etc.

In the Whipping area your swimmer should put their goggles on their head or push them down around their neck. If they are carrying them it is possible they will put them down or get in a fuf at the last minute. It will also stop them chewing and biting them - goggles always snap in the whipping area never in the pool - now why would that be? They should also have their swim-cap on in plenty of time. **Lads need to tie their costumes up tight - double-knot!**

Swimmers will be lined up in the whipping area in heat order and then asked to go forward and stand behind the relevant lane. The timekeeper for the lane will ask your swimmer to confirm their name. For a card open meet your swimmers card will be handed back to them in the Whipping area and they should hand the card to the timekeeper for their lane.

Depending on how many competitors there are in an event there can be a lot of heats and it can take absolutely ages! However your swimmers race will be over pretty quickly so be sure you don't miss it by an inappropriate moment for the loo, coffee or a snooze.

After your swimmers last event they may go home. Although it is advisable to tell the Coach, so he/she knows who is still on the poolside, your swimmer does not have to wait for the end of the event unless the Coach advises otherwise..

Results

When the races have been swum the times of each swimmer are recorded on the computer system which produces the final result sheet after all the races for a particular event have been swum. Results sheets are

displayed around the poolside for the swimmers and around the spectator area for you to read as soon as it is possible to do so.

Speeding Tickets

For some lower graded open meets there are a set of upper cut-off times (usually UQT or UQT plus a few seconds), which swimming faster than these times earns a 'speeding-ticket'. Check the small print in the gala conditions, usually found on the host clubs website, to see if there will be speeding tickets and if so whether the cut of times are UQT or above. Getting a speeding ticket means that the swimmer is not eligible for medals (and is effectively disqualified) but it is a very positive indicator of a 'good time' for that race, in that age group. So your swimmer should be reassured that a speeding-ticket is a good thing just as is a win or a placing or personal-best.

Medals

Generally medals are awarded for the top three in each stroke/age group and ribbons for 4th to 8th places. These can be collected at the event any time after the results are published.

3.Galas

Barramundi do not, at present, swim in a League. However, it is interesting to know what's expected for when we do.

Throughout the year the club could enter teams in galas and leagues at different standards of competition. Swimmers would be selected by the club to swim in these and there are no entry fees or forms to fill in.

The age groups are (usually but not always) determined as age on the date of the gala so your swimmer would be swimming against other swimmers of a similar age who may be faster or slower. Swimmers would be told which event they will be swimming once they have arrived at poolside.

The 'A' team of each age group will generally swim in the higher division of the league and the 'B' and sometimes a 'C' teams will swim in lower divisions at different locations.

Galas and League events take place in a single evening. The races are within age groups against five other (usually local) clubs. The exact number of teams competing depends on the league and the number of lanes at the host pool.

For younger swimmers the races are generally 50m (except 25m fly for the youngest age groups) individuals for each stroke, a Medley relay, a Freestyle relay and a Squadron relay. Swimmers may swim up an age group but may not swim down.

On the night

(See also 'Swimmers Q&A' for general advice)

Club transport would not be provided so you may want to share lifts or ask someone else to transport your swimmer if you cannot take them. Arrive at the host pool at the time requested on the board/sheet. The requested arrival time allows for confirmation of arrival to the Coach, changing and warm up but getting there late will worry the Coach who at some point will have to reallocate your swimmers' races.

Once on poolside (although sometimes after warm up) a team sheet will be available and your swimmer will be able to read this to see which events they are swimming. Swimmers swim the stroke and distance allocated to them. There is no discussion about this as in the weeks prior to the competition a great deal of thought has gone into what stroke each swimmer should do. Relays are always swum in the order stated.

The club will usually put a swimmer in just a relay race for their first experience of competition as this helps to control the inevitable 'first race nerves'. So do not be disappointed if your swimmer only does one length

in the evening - it is an honour to be chosen to swim for their club.

All swimmers are expected to stay until the end of the event and to support their team mates and to congratulate the winning club and the other participating clubs.

4. Championships

Ages for Championships are usually 'age on the last day of the meet'.

Entry forms can be found on the relevant web sites but will also be distributed via the Fixtures officer /coach. Clearly mark which events you want to enter & return the form to your Fixtures officer with the correct amount of money made payable to Didcot Barramundi Swim Club. It is advisable to return the form before the closing date rather than on the very last day, so that any queries can be sorted out early. If you have not got a consideration time for an event but expect to get it in an event before the championship then please speak to your swimmer's coach for advice. If you miss the closing date your swimmer will not be able to participate.

County Championships

These are the first major championships a competitive swimmer will encounter. They are held over a series of weekends in Feb/March and are similar to a Level 1 Open meet in that there are only lower consideration times. However it is not an open meet because they are only open to swimmers of clubs affiliated to the relevant County ASA which for Didcot Barramundi is Oxon and Bucks ASA. In the autumn of each year, the following years "county qualification times" are published on the ONB ASA website. They alter a little each year (usually getting faster), but the previous years can be used as a guide. If your swimmer is faster than the time(s) published the club would expect your swimmer to compete.

Entry forms will be distributed via the Fixtures Officer and should be returned with the relevant payment (made out to Didcot Barramundi Swimming club).

For Counties – times need to be achieved between 1st June – January of the following year. Times from any competition count.

Regional Championships.

This is the next level of Championships and are held May/June. Clubs from the South East Region are eligible to enter swimmers for this event who have achieved regional qualification times (these are published on the South East Region website). This is a high level of competition and the club would expect swimmers obtaining these times to compete.

Qualifying times need to be achieved at recognised i.e. not internal, meets. An added complication is that at SERs (and Nationals), no qualifying times are set for the youngest age groups in 100-metre events - you can enter these only if you make the relevant 200-metre entry time. Although the meets are long-course, entries require short-course times.

For Regionals- times need to be achieved between October 1st – Mid May the following year. Times from Levels 1, 2, 3 only.

National Championships

This is the top level of "age group" swimming for swimmers aged 11-13 (girls) and 11-14 (boys) followed by the National Youth Championship for girls 14+ and boys 15+. It is held in July and is open to all swimmers who achieve a national qualifying time. These are available from the ASA website. **If your swimmer gets this far you probably know what you are doing by then!**

For Nationals- times need to be achieved between October 1st -Mid June the following year .

Times from Levels 1 & 2 and BAGCAT * Championships (Regionals)

(See later note for BAGCATS)

5. Swimmers Q&A

How should we prepare?

In the week before the meet, and at the end of each day of the meet, ensure that your swimmer refuels on top quality athlete's food containing complex carbohydrates. They should also be drinking plenty of fluids, to ensure their body's cells are fully hydrated.

It can add to the nerves before a race if a swimmer is worrying about a new pair of goggles that have just been bought because their usual ones broke. Where possible swimmers should refrain from trying out new costumes or goggles for the first time in a race. It is best for new items to be "experienced" during a training session so that any problems can be resolved ahead of the competition.

What equipment will be needed?

Swimmers usually take their bag with equipment on to pool side. However at large events many items end up in lost property or go missing so ensure everything is well marked and encourage your swimmer to put everything away in their bag when not using it especially during warm up and races. This will also have the advantage that they can find their goggles/hat quickly when they are needed for the race!

To enable identification of swimmers and to have a 'team' look, all swimmers are expected to wear a Didcot Barramundi hat when swimming in external events.

It is a good idea to bring several swimming costumes to a long meet so your swimmer can get changed after a race (if there is time) and stay warm. They should also have at least one spare (tried) pair of goggles or spare straps and clips.

Your swimmer will be in and out of the water all day, so make sure you bring more than one towel. You might find it useful to get a swimmer's chamois. It allows the swimmer to dry off most of the moisture without soaking their usual towel, and saves your laundry basket!

What clothing will be needed?

Some pools can be draughty and it is important to keep warm between events, so bring plenty of warm clothes. Club kit – t-shirts, rugby shirts or a club track suit – must be worn. Don't forget a pair of poolshoes, or flip-flops or *clean* trainers & socks, as a lot of heat can be lost through bare feet on a cold poolside. It is a requirement at all meets that footwear and Tops are worn when the swimmer is not swimming.

Don't forget, if they arrive in their poolside clothes, to make sure they have a dry set to go home in! It can also be useful to have a spare plastic bag for regular clothes and other belongings to keep them dry while the swim bag is on poolside.

What should the swimmer do when not swimming?

Swimmers are expected to stay on poolside during the meet. They must not leave the poolside without a coaches express permission. Coaches need to speak to swimmers during the day for either race strategy advice or to send them up for marshalling to get ready for their race. If your swimmer wants to leave poolside, even if it's just to go to the toilet, they *must* let the Coach know to ensure that they don't miss their race. The Coach has a whole team to keep track of, which can be very difficult if swimmers keep 'disappearing' at crucial moments. If a swimmer leaves poolside to spend some time with parents they must get back in plenty of time for their next race, and let the Coach know they are back.

After their swim it is vital that your swimmer immediately see the Coach, swim down and then if time permits visit with you. Please do not beckon your swimmer over to the spectator area after a race to discuss/congratulate their performance. There should be no messing about in the swim down pool...it is not playtime!

Swimmers should be tidy and pick up all their litter. There are usually plenty of rubbish bags and bins at meets so do encourage your swimmer to use them.

Although swimmers are encouraged to support their team-mates it can be helpful, especially for open meets, for them to bring something, such as a book, magazine or computer game, to keep them occupied during quieter moments. Do be aware that neither the club nor the venue can be held responsible for loss or damage to property so your swimmer should not bring valuables or things that can be damaged by being in a damp atmosphere.

What should the swimmer eat and drink?

On the day of the meet your swimmer may be on poolside for the whole day, so they need to be kept well stocked with small, easily digestible snacks, rather than having large meals. It is just as important to stay well hydrated, so provide plenty of fluids and encourage your swimmer to sip often at their drink during the day.

Although some venues have excellent catering facilities it is best not to rely on them, so bring a selection of food to keep your swimmer in top form throughout the day. For younger swimmers it is best to hand the food to them in small 'doses' to avoid them eating it all within the first hour! To keep perishable food fresh we suggest you use a cool bag with an ice pack.

Food suggestions

Complex carbohydrates for 'grazing' throughout the day, e.g. small portions of:

- 7 Pasta/Rice salad
- 8 Muffins (sweet or savoury)
- 9 Bread, Pitta bread, Bagels
- 10 Pizza (but be careful of fatty toppings)
- 11 Rice cakes
- 12 Breakfast cereals or Cereal bars
- 13 Bananas
- 14 Popcorn

Jacket potatoes are also suitable if available at the venue's catering outlet.

Drinks suggestions

- 15 Water
- 16 Sports drinks
- 17 Weak squash

Note: Fizzy drinks & glass containers of any kind are banned.

What do I need to do?

You have to make sure that your swimmer gets an early night before the gala and arrives at the pool in plenty of time

In the rush to get your swimmer ready it can be easy to forget your own needs, so don't forget to pack items for yourself. You might want to bring a comfortable cushion (some venues have very hard spectator seating), something to read, a pen or pencil to mark up your programme, and a separate picnic with plenty to drink. Some parents also like to bring a stopwatch but this is not essential as many venues have electronic time board and results will be printed and displayed at the venue during the sessions. It is worth noting your swimmers times for each event as DQ's will not get an official time recorded but praise for a PB, even with a disqualification, will help the disappointment.

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!

How can we see the Results?

Each time the swimmer swims the results will be fed back to the club and Didcot Barramundi swimmers times will be posted on the web site under 'RESULTS'. Full results of external meets will be posted on the relevant hosting clubs/championship web site. This can take a few weeks so keep checking!

Are there trophies or medals?

The medal system and their quality will vary from event to event. Please see advice on individual events for guidance on awards.

What/Where are my PBs?

When the swimmer achieves a time that is better than their existing time for that stroke/distance it is recorded on the clubs PB database. The 'latest' PBs can be found in a file on the website. PBs are recorded separately for 25m, short course (SC) pools and 50m long course (LC) pools. You should keep your own record of your swimmer's PB's in your own logbook.

These PBs should be used to check against qualifying times for Open Meets and Championships.

PBs achieved in events where your swimmer is not representing Didcot Barramundi i.e. schools galas, can be emailed to the Fixtures Officer for inclusion in the PB database.

What are BAGCATS?

British Age Group Categories or BAGCat points are a system of points which are awarded for different swims. When a swimmer competes in a BAGCat event, their time is converted into points that take into account a swimmer's age and sex. A swimmer can take part in as many events in a season as they choose to, but only their highest points score in each swimming category will count towards their final BAGCat total.

For an event the overall position of a swimmer is the sum of the BEST point score in each of the 5 categories (50m events, 100m, FORM, Distance and IM (100IM for 9-11 year olds and 200-400IM for older swimmers). It is therefore advisable to enter every category in the Age Groups if you can achieve the qualifying times. (N.B boys 12 and below and girls 11 and below don't swim the 100m individual events).

What are ASA Competitive Awards?

		Bronze	Silver	Gold	Platinum
Stroke	Distanc	Time	Time	Time	Time
I Medley	4x25m	1:58.60	1:43.60	1:34.10	
I Medley	4x50m	4:17.20	3:44.60	3:24.10	3:09.50
I Medley	4x100m	9:03.70	7:55.00	7:11.50	6:40.60
Frontcrawl	25m	0:21.00	0:18.30	0:16.70	
Frontcrawl	50m	0:47.00	0:41.00	0:37.20	
Frontcrawl	100m	1:44.30	1:31.00	1:22.80	1:16.90
Frontcrawl	200m	3:49.90	3:20.80	3:02.40	2:49.40
Frontcrawl	400m	8:04.70	7:03.50	6:24.70	5:57.20
Frontcrawl	800m	16:45.30	14:38.20	13:17.90	12:20.70
Frontcrawl	1500m	31:55.00	27:55.20	25:26.70	23:27.10
Butterfly	25m	0:23.20	0:20.30	0:18.50	
Butterfly	50m	0:52.40	0:45.70	0:41.50	
Butterfly	100m	1:53.80	1:39.40	1:30.40	1:23.90
Butterfly	200m	4:09.20	3:37.70	3:17.80	3:03.70
Backstroke	25m	0:24.70	0:21.50	0:19.60	
Backstroke	50m	0:54.40	0:47.50	0:43.00	
Backstroke	100m	1:56.00	1:41.40	1:32.00	1:25.50
Backstroke	200m	4:11.10	3:39.40	3:19.40	3:05.00
Breaststroke	25m	0:27.20	0:23.80	0:21.70	
Breaststroke	50m	1:00.40	0:52.70	0:48.00	
Breaststroke	100m	2:21.00	1:55.40	1:44.80	1:37.30
Breaststroke	200m	4:40.40	4:05.00	3:42.60	3:26.60

The ASA has a set of competitive award standards and badges for your swimmer to work towards regardless of age. The required times for these awards are in the previous table. Badges (and certificates) can be purchased through the ASA. We are not currently operating this scheme but are looking to do so in the near future.

6. COMMON TERMS

Consideration or Qualification time - the slowest entry time for a particular event that the organisers of a gala will consider.

DQ'd and disq. - Abbreviation for disqualified on result sheets and time cards (See 'reason' codes later)

Entry time - The time submitted by the club for a swimmer being entered in a gala. If entries are made well in advance, the entry time may not be the swimmers current PB

Form Stroke - One of the three strokes having specific requirements (ie. 200M, Breaststroke, Butterfly or Backstroke). Freestyle is not a Form Stroke but is used for distance events, such as 200/400/800 or 1500m depending on the swimmers age and sex.

Heat Declared Winner (HDW) - When no final is swum and the winner is declared on the times swum in the heats.

I.M. - individual medley. The competitor swims all four strokes in the following order: - butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke and freestyle.

Licensed meets: This term has now replaced "designated meets". These are the only meets via which you can qualify for national competitions

Long course - Events held in a 50 m pool

LQT - Lower Qualification Time. The slowest entry time for a particular event that the organisers of a gala will consider.

Medley relay - Four swimmers each swim a different stroke. The order is always backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly and freestyle.

PB - A swimmers personal best time for a given event.

UQT - Upper Qualification Time. The fastest entry time for a particular event that the organisers of a gala will consider.

Short course - Events held in a 25m pool

Squadron relay – Usually the last race of a gala. A freestyle relay consisting of one swimmer from each age group or one swimmer of each sex from each age group.

A.S.A. - Amateur Swimming Association

Scr - scratched – which means your entry to an event was not successful.

ONB – Oxfordshire and North Bucks – the County that your club belongs to.

Whipping Area – the area where the swimmers go to prepare for their race – usually marshalled and where swimmers are put in the right heat and lane order.