



Race Day for Novices & Nervous Parents

Arrival

Swimmers should be well rested – go to bed early the night before – and nutritionally well-prepared and hydrated. Swimmers should also know what races they will be swimming, and make themselves familiar with the programme of events.

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). Know your route, leave plenty of time for the journey and arrive 30 minutes before the start of the pool warm-up session. Have change for the car park!

Meet types

Most meets use start sheets (lists of competitors in each event). 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. Results from all licensed meets are submitted to Swim Wales and go towards your swimmers ranking.

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 club coaches and the meet officials. Please be on time for the start of your warm up session unless agreed with the coach.

When instructed to leave the pool, swimmers should immediately dry off, change into their racing costume t-shirt and track suit, and **keep warm, drink and snack**.

Swimmers remain on poolside with the team throughout the meet session; this helps with team building and develops team spirit. Parents, meanwhile, remain on the balcony, supporting and socialising (and occasionally sleeping), and giving their beloved offspring encouraging smiles and supportive gestures!

Race Preparation

Prior to racing, swimmers should listen carefully to any instruction from their coach, who is there to help them swim their race well. Swimmers must also listen out for instructions to report to poolside marshals. Marshals are the officials responsible for gathering swimmers together and organising them into the correct heats and lanes. The marshals will tick you off their list and tell you which heat and lane you are swimming in. There is no second chance if you miss your heat.

Race Starts for Beginners

Competitors can leave their tracksuits, t-shirts etc, on until just before a race. It's a good idea to put on your hat and prepare your goggles just before the marshal sends you to the blocks. Once there it's warm clothing off and into the box 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 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, it is deemed a false start. In most meets the "one start rule" is applied which means swimmers do not have a second chance. One false start and they are immediately disqualified.

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.

After the Event

Congratulations, job done! When the event is over, collect your things and return to 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.

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 an 8-lane pool the swimmers will occupy the lanes as follows: 4,5,3,6,2,7,1,8, in fastest to slowest order.

Advice for Uninitiated Parents!

Preparation is the key. Get everything possible ready the night before. Most families take a cool bag with a plentiful supply of drinks, snacks and healthy high carbohydrate lunch items (see the Nutrition sheet for guidance). Don't rely on suitable food being available at the venue.

Take a pen to record times/splits etc, and something (a book, ipod, etc) to occupy you – there can be long waits between events. Oh, and dress for a summer's day,

even even on a freezing weekend in January – pools get very hot...

Watching your child swim in a competition is exciting but it can also be very nerve wracking, and everyone reacts to the situation differently.

Once the race is underway some parents shout hysterically, much to the amusement and incredulity of others. Enthusiasm is great but your child is likely to thank you more if you stay calm. Give them a reassuring hug and wish them luck prior to the meet, but offer no technical or tactical advice; congratulate them after their swim, and console them if they are disappointed with their performance, without any analysis.

Enjoy yourself and help them to appreciate the highs and occasional lows of this great sport. Don't expect them to achieve a personal best every time they race, and don't set them targets or offer rewards. A swimmers reward is a job well done, win or lose.

Most of all enjoy the day!