

Gala information for Parents and Carers.

If this is your child's first gala then there's a few things you might want to know.

The athlete (formerly known as your son/daughter/nephew/niece) will have come home from a training-session at the pool and told you the date of the gala and that they are in a couple of events..... closer to the day the athlete will have been given their event-cards if that is the system for that gala. These have to be handed-in at the pool - usually in a box in the entrance hall, with the event-number on it.

What's my job?

You have to make sure that the athlete gets an early night before the gala and arrives at the pool in plenty of time. If it is a gala with an event-card system it is your job to make sure that they are there to drop their cards in before the deadline for that session. There is usually a morning and an afternoon deadline. Make sure the athlete has their club tee-shirt, costume and a spare costume , goggles, spare goggles, spare goggle-straps..... oh and 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. Sorting out the lunch is also in the job-description!

It is not your job to pack their bag, merely to check that it is done. From the earliest stages get the swimmer to pack their own bag and sort their own equipment. They are perfectly capable of doing this. This is important as they must learn to take charge of their swimming as soon as possible. Also if they pack their stuff they are less likely to forget it, a lost tee-shirt and pair of goggles adding up to nearly £20 per competition will be hard for you to sustain.

We have ways of knowing you are phoning from the IKEA car park while you tell us you are at the casualty department at the General. Remember that if your athlete doesn't turn up to the event, because you wanted to stay at the barbecue or you are stuck in the Ikea car park, age-group restrictions at the gala might mean the club can't field a swimmer legally and other swimmers may be unable to swim without a 'fourth' for a relay-team. **If you said you were going to be there, BE THERE.**

What's my main indicator of success for the day?

Punctual delivery of the swimmer and the card or registration, is your primary indicator of success. This is how the gala officials know the athlete is in the building and ready to race. If you arrive after the boxes or registration desks are closed that's it. The dash from home has been a waste of time and you are in deep-trouble with the athlete.

Insurance.

Definitely have a good look at the map, timetables and instructions the night before so you know where you are going. Make sure you know which session the athlete's events

are in. Set the alarm-clock and leave home in plenty of time so that the athlete (and you) can remain calm. Check the tick-sheet from the gala-advice webpage. Blokes please remember that that method of driving faster when lost and blaming everyone else for the confusion fools no one AND rattles the swimmer.

How long does it take?

It can take absolutely ages! And the races are all over pretty quickly. Be sure you don't miss it by an inappropriate moment for the loo, coffee or a snooze. If you do it will take at least 10 years before the family re-telling becomes bearable. Depending on how many competitors there are in an event there can be a lot of heats. It can be a long day so it's a good idea to try and share the load if you and another family have athletes competing across the day, you can share the morning out and evening back.

What's the food like?

Great if you can survive on crisps, twix, Red Bull and chips - and the usual leisure-centre fare. It's better to get a good packed-lunch in a picnic-bag and take loads of water and favourite juices so that you can eat what you want, when you want.

Is it comfortable?

Not really, and it will be very hot, don't wear warm-clothes and at some pools you need to be there early to get the best seats, many people bring a cushion.

What about the trophies and certificates?

For these you have to wait right through to the end, as these are handed-out at the end of the morning and at the end of the afternoon sessions - after the events and the finals. The medal system and their quality will vary from event to event.

What's the social dynamic?

It's a club and this is a team. Mutual-support is the order of the day. The coach and assistants will play a key role on the poolside and the athletes are expected to support each other. As parents you'll probably have little direct contact with your athlete as being poolside is restricted to teams and team-managers but support from the viewing gallery will be appreciated and expected (not just for your own offspring but for other club swimmers)! WVASC supporters are known for being loud. In the event that you have to go poolside to give a coach a breather, console an athlete or whatever please remember to remove footwear and try to have flip-flops or clean footwear on. The admonishment you might receive from a gala official if you are in street shoes is not pleasant.

Remember you are the parent/carer of the swimmer, you are NOT the coach. While not winning the swimmer may have set a new PB, worked on a new technique and

had a wonderful time. Be supportive, make sure both you and the swimmer talk to the coach before you offer any opinions that dismiss the superhuman physical and psychological effort that your hero has just performed. Remember they have performed it despite growing up, studying, getting bigger, getting smarter, working out how the world works, and tolerating the aforementioned coach. They also put up with that bloke in the car in the morning driving too fast and shouting while lost - (not sexist, women don't do that).

What else goes on?

There may be shops - swimwear-retailers will usually have a stall - there can be bargains on previous-year costumes and goggles and some fundraising events by the host club.

Gala information for Swimmers.

There is no index - read the lot. If it's too long for you swimmer - ponder on that fact.

You should have the following items with you when you go to a gala:

- complete club kit with at least one tee shirt
- swim trunks/suit
- very clean trainers for the pool-side
- spare trunks/suit
- two pairs of goggles (including pristine, adjusted, lucky, gala-goggles)
- two swimming hats (1 Club)
- towel
- drink (water with glucose or fruit juice)
- something to help you relax (CD/cassette, MP3 players, DS, magazine, book)
- boiled sweets, dried dates and apricots, banana, orange (for gumming and drinking, not eating)
- sense of fun and a positive attitude to being part of a team striving to be the best

YOU pack your bag.

Pack your own bag, YOU are the athlete, YOU need to know what YOU have with YOU and where it is. YOU need what is in it. YOU have worked and trained hard to get here and your parents or carers have worked hard to get YOU to training. Who are YOU now to sit back and have them wait on YOU. It's time for YOU to start sorting out stuff for YOU. The first step to controlling your own swimming as YOU move into competition is YOU packing your own kit. YOU need it, YOU use it, YOU pack it.

Sleep and night-before food.

There is no substitute for sleep and you need it before competition. Many of your friends, especially non-competitive types, will arrange awake-overs on Friday nights - avoid these and get your head down. If you are daft enough to go then, at the gala, when you are feeling drowsy and dazed and swimming like a lemon, you will know why. Meanwhile your 'friend's' performance, slouched on the settee guzzling fizzy drinks and pizza and gawping at the telly while texting their X-Factor votes in, will be undiminished. If you still go ahead and go to Friday sleepovers then you will be helping the coaches form an opinion of the level of your ambition.

Get home from training on Friday and eat a big bowl of pasta, rice or potatoes, relax a bit and then head for bed. What's the point in training for perfection for months and then crocking your body the night before so that you can only disappoint yourself and let down your family and team-mates.

Some information about pre-race meals.

Keep in mind that a pre-race meal affects your performance. You should NOT change your eating habits drastically on the day you have a gala. You should however avoid certain foods which tend to upset your stomach or cause discomfort. It is a good policy to finish eating a moderate-sized meal at least 2 1/2 to 3 hours before competing, if you are in a morning session, eat something which is light on the stomach and what you enjoy.

Morning sessions are the toughest from this point of view - anyone can eat a bowl of pasta or couscous at lunchtime but you have to get things you like such as porridge, lots of jam toast, cereal and juices or whatever in at breakfast. This goes for whatever time it is - you may have to drive 40miles for an 08.15 warm-up so it might be very early. Picky eaters or swimmers who don't just get the fuel in and think they can perform are kidding themselves. You may enjoy the parental "pleading breakfast dance" but it is time for YOU to get on with getting prepared for action without fuss. This isn't about what YOU LIKE it is about what YOU NEED. Try to avoid the following foods prior to a gala:

- Fried potatoes, chips, fried chicken flesh in glue and breadcrumbs, hamburgers, pies, avian-protein 'nuggets*' (*protein, fat and starch 'blobs'). Or any other methods of retailing compressed offal slurry and mechanically recovered protein made palatable by immersion in saturated fats.
- Spicy and BBQ food.
- Hard-to-digest vegetables: radish, onion, cucumber, and raw vegetables.
- Large servings of steak and fish
- If you are nervous, avoid milk and dairy products.

Eating during the competition.

PLEASE do not eat anything during the gala, and especially in between heats except sugary sweets like boiled sweets or werthers! If you are hungry have some of your drink by just taking little sips, this stops you from feeling bloated. You should never have fizzy drinks, unless it is an isotonic drink ie; Lucozade Sport - water is the best drink there is.

Save money and experiment with making your own special energy drink: bit of fruit juice, lots of water, pinch of sugar, pinch of salt (if you believe in that stuff) it's probably going to be as good or better than those bottles of energy drink you buy in the shops

We are told that for 20 minutes after activity like a race our bodies use any sugar we take and send it not to our stomach but straight to our muscles ready for more activity. When you get out of the water after a race that race is over, done, history - review with coach at the pool-end, learn and move on. Your job is now to prepare your body for the next race; have a drink, have some sugar like a sweet, fruit, dates, apricots - all low volume - high sugar - NO BUNS. Keep your body warm and ready through flexing and stretching.

Warm-up.

You should warm-up on the poolside as well as in the water. You all start at the same time and warm-up together. This should last for approx. 15 minutes.

- Arm rotations
- Horizontal arm swings
- Trunk twisting
- Light Shoulder Stretch
- Ankle stretching

Pre-race warm-up in the pool:

At every gala there is a short session when everyone gets into the water for a warm-up - you will be told which lane is the lane for WVASC. Girls go first then they get out and the boys get in and you will find it useful to run through your strokes with some dives and turns - take this seriously as it really puts you a little more at ease. Remember to get dry, put on a dry costume and keep warm afterwards - here are some ideas for what you should try to do in the warm-up

- 200m F/c (stroke long & stretched out)
- 100m on your 'special' stroke
- 50m Fly 30 sec Ri
- 50m B/c 30 sec Ri
- 50m Br 30 sec Ri
- 50m F/c 30 sec Ri
- 2x25m Sprints on Your Spec Stroke
- Turns and Starts
- 50m own choice

Why stretch?

Stretching a muscle causes the fibres in the muscle to lengthen. Longer muscle-fibres generate more contraction force than shorter fibres. It is important to not over-stretch and cause yourself an injury but they should be flexed. During any exercise muscles produce

lactic acid that causes the muscles-fibres to shorten and reduces contraction-force. This is what we feel as fatigue develops and our muscles begin to “tighten up”. If you begin the exercise (swimming) with longer well-stretched muscle-fibres, you will be able to generate greater contraction forces for longer as lactate builds up. **YOU WILL BE ABLE TO SWIM MORE AGGRESSIVELY FOR LONGER**

Will you prepare to swim your best - or do your best to wait to swim?

After you have finished your warm-up, you should take a hot shower, dry yourself off and keep warm. Change your costume and wear a dry suit. It might be a long time before your swim and you should keep your muscles warm. Many sensible swimmers will get dressed warmly and even wear a hood or a wooly hat. You should have warm, dry trainers on your feet with socks, and warm-up pants so that you are toasty warm. Standing for three hours on a wet, cold, tiled floor will chill you through. Keep moving and doing light stretches to loosen your muscles, support your team mates, watch the swimming. Try to stay active! Think positive. Do not lie down and have a sleep, you will find it hard to get your adrenaline running through your body before you race. One of the best things is to run on the spot, jump or skip to get your heart working faster ready for the work it is about to do, otherwise it might just be getting up to working speed at about the time you touch the end wall. This often works best for many people.

Before you go to the 'whipping-area' come and see one of the coaches for your pre-race briefing and start stretching for real without straining yourself - do not sit slumped trying to look as if you are waiting for a bus and blending in with the other slumped swimmers. Get up and stretch and keep inhaling and thinking about what you are about to do. When you have swum come and get feedback on your race from a coach.

Housekeeping and behaviour.

Treat every gala as an opportunity to learn your craft. Watch the fastest swimmers and also look for what you think are the 'best' swimmers in the water and see what they do. Watch what they do out of the water as well, how they prepare to swim, how they warm up, and their levels of concentration and focus prior to swimming. Where there is a scoreboard note their times and learn what a fast swim looks like - looks can be deceiving. When you swim find out your times, remember your PB, look for ways to improve everything you do. Look at the swimmers in the other lanes and remember them - then remember where you came when you next see them. This is not a rehearsal, this is the real thing.

Rowdy behaviour distracts you from concentrating and preparing to do your best. If you are noisy or talking loudly at the start of races swimmers can be distracted and the officials will not be happy - the club may even be told off. Do not play with other swimmers property, do not play practical jokes on people. Highly-motivated and focussed athletes preparing themselves to fly down a pool do not always have their usual sense of humour.

Remember that you are guests of another club in another town. We are a sports team so wear sports clothes and club uniform on the poolside. DO NOT wear street-shoes on the poolside - EVER! Keep the team-area clean and tidy, pick up all of your papers and litter and leave no mess. If the club does leave a mess, even once, some people will ALWAYS remember it and the club may not be invited back.

This long stern list might make a gala seem like an ordeal - it isn't, it is very exciting and great fun and you really will enjoy it. You might feel everyone else is very calm and untroubled but they have been 'first-timers' too and know how you feel and will support you. It might be a bit of a blur but you will enjoy it. The points above are years of learning written on one page and it would be impossible for you to remember it in one go, so don't worry. This is a page to come back to and check and see what you have remembered from it. It will also be interesting thinking of all the little tricks and ideas you come up with yourself.

Good Luck!