



## Parents' Guide to Galas

The following is intended to be a basic guide to Swimming Galas (open meets and team galas). It is written by parents for parents. We hope it is helpful; we have tried to be as accurate as possible!

### When and how should I be entering my child for galas?

With a few exceptions, swimmers cannot compete in galas until they are at least 9 years old. 9 & 10 year olds are not eligible to swim in all races (i.e. 100m races). There is no requirement for your child to take part in galas; however, if they wish to progress and swim competitively, then swimming galas may become a regular fixture in your life! Of course your child won't know if they enjoy this competitive aspect of swimming until they have tried it, so it is something that you may wish to try out.

The club championships (around November every year) are open to all swimmers and are a good opportunity for all swimmers to try out competitive swimming in a familiar environment.

### Types of Gala

There are 2 main types of swimming gala – league galas are team events which the club competes in against other clubs, and Open Galas (often referred to as open meets) which you enter as an individual, swimming as a member of a club. In addition to this there are a number of schools galas that your child's school may take part in, and there are county, and regional championships taking place at certain points in the year. Swimmers are selected to be in team galas and if your child is selected you will be sent an email about this. It is entirely up to you whether you enter your child for an open meet, and details of upcoming open meets can be seen on the website in the Club Calendar section. Note that open meets have a closing date which you must adhere to.

### Open Meets

Open Meets (also called Open Galas), these are organised by swimming clubs and run at weekends. These galas are operated as "licensed galas" which means they are licensed by the ASA, and the times achieved by all swimmers will be recorded on the ASA database. This is an official event that runs to strict rules, and so although we hope your child will really love competing, it is also a serious event. While there are many open meets running through the year, the club decides which ones Monson will attend – and this means that not only will a coach(es) be there, but also the training schedule will be planned so that swimmers are at an optimum point in training at the time of a gala. You can find more information about this on the website (guidelines on entering open meets [here](#)).

Open meets are organised by individual clubs and all the information about one will be found on that club's website. This will include information such as the events, entry times, schedule of the day as well as the "promoter's conditions" which we recommend you read as it will include information such as entry fees, spectator fees, parking information etc. You should also refer to the information [on the website](#) a day or so before the gala as warm up times can change and it is your responsibility to be there in good time.

Open Meets run at weekends, sometimes just one day, often over both Saturday and Sunday, occasionally just over an afternoon and/or evening. The day will usually be split into 2 or 3 sessions, often starting about 8am, with a warm up beforehand at a certain time. You need to aim to arrive at least 30 mins before the warm up.

Each session of the gala has a time by which swimmers must be either “signed in” or “signed out”: some galas operate a “sign in” system where swimmers must sign themselves in for each race on a sheet, by a specified time (usually this is around warm up time), others operate a “sign out” system where swimmers are assumed to be swimming unless they sign out before a specified time. The promoter’s conditions will stipulate which system is being used. If you are not going to attend, or wish to withdraw your swimmer from events(s) please advise the coach who is going to the gala.

Swimmers spend most of their time poolside with the coach; spectators pay to watch from the gallery. It is important that swimmers are poolside for most of the time as they need to be ready to go to the “whipping area” for their race when all the competitors are called for that race. Your child might want to take a book, or other entertainment (mp3 player, iPod etc.) with them, as well as some food and plenty to drink. There is a fee for each race entered (usually approx. £5) – this covers costs associated with hire of the venue, lifeguards etc., as well as making some money for the club hosting the gala. Every gala needs a huge number of officials and helpers – from the referees and judges through to volunteers who run raffles, bring drinks round to the timekeepers etc. If you are a qualified timekeeper or judge (we often offer training through Monson) then you may wish to help out at a gala at which your child is attending – the host clubs always need officials and it is usually a requirement that an attending club supplies one or more official to help the event run – if we can’t supply the officials we may not be able to enter.

In most competitions, medals, trophies, and sometimes ribbons are awarded to the top 3 or 6 swimmers in each event (an “event” being a race of a particular distance in a particular stroke for a competitor of a particular age). Participants are usually grouped into heats according to their previous personal best (PB) times to ensure they race against swimmers of a similar standard/speed irrespective of age. The results, however, are for the top swimmers per age category so if your child is beaten by older swimmers during the heats, they may still be a winner in their age group. This system is known as “Heat Declared Winner” or HDW. Encourage your child to aim a new PB in each event and if they win a medal too, even better!

On the club website is detailed information (guidelines on open meets) regarding open meets and what races you should aim to do. As a rule of thumb you might want to do at least a freestyle race, an IM, and race(s) in the stroke(s) that your child is best at, and maybe something they wouldn’t usually do. Don’t enter your child for everything, they will just get too tired and will not perform their best. All the coaches will be happy to advise you, and plenty of parents who have experience of galas will also be happy to guide you – we have all been there....

**How do I enter an open meet?** The website lists all upcoming galas at [http://www.rtwmonson.org/Swimming-Calendar\(1932832\).htm](http://www.rtwmonson.org/Swimming-Calendar(1932832).htm) and the weekly newsletter and you need to complete the Monson open gala entry form and submit this with your payment to the Open Gala Secretary (Sarah Burns for Level 3 & 4 galas, Julie Newton for Level 1 & 2 galas) or to any of the coaches by the deadline (often about 2 months before the gala).

Please read the promoter’s conditions, make sure to enter on time and fill in all details correctly, if details are missing or incorrect your child’s entry may not be accepted. Our gala secretaries deal with a large number of entries and need to submit entries early on to ensure we get in (often it’s first come first served).

- Use the Monson open gala [entry form](#) only – separate form for each Open Meet (unless advised otherwise)
- You need to include your child’s ASA membership number (if you don’t know this please consult the [ASA website](#) where you will find your child’s ASA number, if it is not there please contact Ann Hunt, Club Secretary ([annhunt@aol.com](mailto:annhunt@aol.com)) who will advise you. By clicking on your child’s ASA number you will see whether they have Category 2 membership status – if not please contact Ann Hunt as you will need to amend the status by completing a form.
- Please fill the form in with the events in order – i.e. event 2 before event 4 etc.; it makes it much easier for our gala secretaries to enter the data.

- If you don't know your child's PB (personal best – the time you need to be submit as their entry time) please speak to their coach as you must submit a speed with each race entry. You may find it invaluable to keep a list of their PBs yourself, this is also a good way for your child to see how they are improving – there are also plenty of apps on the market to enable you to store this information effortlessly. If your child took part in the last club championships you can find their times achieved on the website – the results for the [2014 Club Champs](#). You can also check the [SportsTek Portal](#) to check what times have been recorded for your child since 2014.
- The promoters conditions will say if you need to submit “short course” or SC (i.e. achieved in a 25m pool) or “long course” (LC – achieved in a 50m pool) entry times. For most SC galas, SC times are needed, but please check. See the “long course & short course” section for information on converting times SC to LC and vice versa.
- Payment must be made with the entry form. We can't accept late payments, and for admin reasons we need a separate payment for each gala please.
- Cancellations – if you have submitted your application, have received confirmation and your circumstances change preventing your child from participating, please let the Gala Secretary know as soon as possible so she can notify the organisers. Often Open Galas are oversubscribed and if they haven't been given notice, the Club can be fined.

**What is the difference between different levels – i.e. Level 1, 2, 3 and 4?** This mainly refers to the level of judging at a particular gala however as a rule of thumb a level 3 or 4 gala will have easier entry times than a level 2 or 1 gala and therefore is much more suitable for younger swimmers who are just starting to attend galas. Unless your child is an exceptional swimmer you will find that the majority of galas you attend will initially be level 4 or level 3.

### Qualifying Times

All races have some form of qualifying times and you will find these in the information pack relating to the gala which will be on the hosting club's website. The age your child swims at is usually “age on the day” of the gala. Lower qualifying time (LQT) is the slowest speed you are eligible to enter the race at, Upper Qualifying Time (UQT) is the fastest speed you can enter – for example the 11 yr girls 50m freestyle LQT might be 50.00 seconds – in order to take part your child needs to be able to swim this race faster than this speed, and the UQT might be 35.00 seconds – so they cannot enter if their speed is faster than this. The organisers of a gala reserve the right to reject entries if they have too many to accommodate. You will be advised if this happens and will be able to reclaim your money from the Treasurer. It is not unusual for some Open Meets to have no LQT requirement.

### Team Galas

Monson competes in a number of leagues against other local clubs. These include the Kent Junior League, the National Arena League and the Diddy League. Swimmers for these events are chosen by the club coaches; our aim is to win, and therefore to field the best possible team. It is therefore the fastest swimmers at the time who will be asked if they can take part. In choosing a team the coaches will look at a swimmer's time trial speeds, their general performance at training, and their speeds on the ASA database if they have participated in other licensed galas.

If your child is asked to participate we hope they are proud to be asked, and display commitment to take part. League galas usually run over 3 events spanning several months. If your child is asked to take part, it is recommended that you note the other dates in your diary as you may be asked to take part in the other galas of that league; these can be found in the swimming calendar section of the website. These galas take place at the weekend, often an afternoon or sometimes an evening; the club usually arranges for coach transport to get the swimmers there and back; there is usually space for parents/supporters too. All team members are asked to pay a match fee which contributes towards the cost of transportation whether or not they use it – swimmers are encouraged to

travel on the coach as it's fun, generates a good team feel and means we know everyone will arrive on time – an individual swimmer arriving late can impact the overall outcome for the whole team. On the way back we usually make a stop at McDonalds, so please bring some money if you wish to.

A team gala will comprise a number of individual races as well as medleys, and there are usually rules governing how many races an individual may compete in. Your child won't find out what races they are in until they are at the gala; this is because it is sometimes necessary to change the teams around – for example if a swimmer is absent due to illness, the team manager may need to rearrange the team at their discretion. Some swimmers may be selected to swim only in a relay race; this may seem disappointing but remember that their participation is vital for the team; they may help make up a stronger relay team, and it is everyone's contribution which goes towards the club hopefully winning.

**What about county and regional times?** The website makes reference to swimmers chasing county times – and this means achieving a Kent Qualifying Time (KQT or county time) which has to be achieved, at a licensed gala, in order to enter the Kent County Championships which take place in February and March every year. Regional times, likewise have to be achieved at licensed galas in order to take part in the South East Regional Championships.

**County Championships** are held annually in Feb/March. Participation is based upon achieving the qualifying times set out at <http://www.kentswimming.org> at a "licensed" meet within a set period before the championships. The exact rules change from year to year so keep an eye on the "Championship Conditions" too. When the ASA licenses an event, all the results are automatically recorded on the ASA website. Only these times are applicable when trying for the County Champs. A full list of all licensed meets nationwide can be found at [www.swimming.org/go/calendar](http://www.swimming.org/go/calendar). Times achieved at any licensed UK event are acceptable so you may look beyond Kent, but Monson will obviously tend to focus on meets in the SE.

**Regional & National Championships** – the regionals are held twice per year. The spring regionals (held in May after the Kent Champs) are open to all age groups who meet the qualifying criterion. The winter regionals offer races for only 2 age categories ("junior" being under 16 yrs and "senior" being over 16 yrs). The Nationals (held in the summer) are open to "Age Group" and "Youth" swimmers, the age groups being 11/12 yrs, 13 yrs, 14 yrs and the youths being 15/16 yrs, 17/18 yrs and 19+ yrs.

**Long course and short course?** Most galas, particularly Level 3 or 4, take part in a 25 metre pool, this is classed as Short Course (SC); however there are also Long Course (LC) galas which take place in 50 metre pools; occasionally these are at level 3 but more frequently they are level 2 or 1, and the entry times are more demanding. If your child has done several SC galas and a level 3 LC one comes up, they may be keen to get experience of swimming in a long course pool. The promoter's conditions (info on the gala) of any gala will state whether the times submitted on the entry form need to be LC or SC. LC & SC times for the same race differ slightly due to the fact that you turn less frequently in a long course pool. If you only have times for SC events and want to participate in a LC event, this is a useful website to convert your child's SC times <http://www.pullbuoy.co.uk/times>.

**What else do I need to take to a gala?** Your child will need, ideally their swimming costume, flip-flops or crocs to wear poolside, 2 pairs of goggles and 2 hats – the last thing you want is for something to break just before they swim a race. They should also take a couple of towels, navy or club t-shirt and some shorts/jogging bottoms. As mentioned, something to do/read is useful, and they will need food and drinks. Low fat high energy foods are good, try to avoid highly sugary foods like sweets and chocolate bars (which give an immediate sugar rush followed by a low that will affect your swim times) and avoid crisps. Focus mainly on carbohydrates and do not snack within 20 minutes of a race. Recommended snacks include fruit, cereal and energy bars, fresh or dried fruit, hot cross buns, mini bagels and mini pancakes. For more ideas go to the members section of the website and look at Kim's nutrition presentation from 2010.

To drink, offer water or squash (no added sugar varieties are best). Try adding a pinch of salt (not enough that it can be tasted) for a home-made isotonic drink.

Good luck!

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