

# A Guide to Galas



In swimming club, we have our 'Learn to Swim' programme in the minor pool and most of our members will have joined the club at this stage. As they learn the various techniques and skills taught they will progress through this to the Monday night session and eventually to the Tuesday night senior section of the club.

Somewhere along the way the opportunity to compete will arise. Everybody learns and progresses at their own rate and this will be at different ages for different children. Being a member of a competitive swimming club is not the same as just taking lessons to learn how to swim, there is also a long term goal of learning how to compete and becoming a competitive swimmer. When you filled in your child's membership form it clearly stated that if and when your child was deemed fit to compete, **it is expected that they will swim for the team in both home and away galas**. It is expected that come the time, you will support the club that has taught your child to swim and encourage them as they begin to compete. This is a guide to help you and your child understand what is involved in competing and the different kinds competitions that may be suitable for them.

#### *What is a swimming gala/meet?*

Galas, or meets, are a series of competitions involving other swimming clubs and they usually form part of a league. There are two leagues: one entry level league for younger swimmers and one league for the age 9-99 age group! Each league has several divisions – 1,2,3,4, etc 1-being the top. Clubs compete in galas both at home and away against all the other clubs in their division.

For each gala, our club puts forward a team to compete against another club. In the league there will usually be 5-7 other clubs and we swim against each of those teams at some point during the season. At the end of the season, depending on points and number of wins/loses, a team will be promoted or relegated to a different division in the league, much like football or other team sports. 'One off' galas can also take place, not as part of a league but as a friendly competition.

#### *What leagues do Ballymoney Amateur Swimming Club compete in?*

We compete in the 'PTL' (Provincial Towns League) and also 'Aquasprints Junior Swimming League'. Aquasprints are aimed at children age 9-12 and PTL for children 9 and over.



[www.ulsterptl.co.uk](http://www.ulsterptl.co.uk)

[www.aquasprint.co.uk](http://www.aquasprint.co.uk)

#### *What events are at a gala?*

PTL and Aquasprint galas consist of both relay events and individual events. There are individual events for each stroke (backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly and freestyle). There are separate races for males and females. In PTL galas these races are 50m (2 lengths) and in Aquasprint galas they are 25m (1 length). In a 6 lane pool each club will swim 3 swimmers for each individual event. In a 5 lane pool, one team will swim 3 boys and 2 girls and the other team vice versa. The away team decides which way round that will be. In PTL galas there is also a '100m IM' (individual medley) event - this is when a swimmer swims one length of each stroke in this order – butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke, freestyle, in a 100m race.

There are two different relay events in PTL and Aquasprint galas – 'Medley Relays' and 'Freestyle Relays'. In the Medley Relay each of the 4 swimmers will swim 25/50m of a different stroke – the first swimmer swims backstroke, the second swimmer breaststroke, the third butterfly and the fourth freestyle. In the Freestyle Relay all 4 swimmers swim 25/50m freestyle.

#### *What age do you have to be to swim in one of these galas?*

The current guidelines from Swim Ireland state that children can begin to compete in the year they will be turning 9.

In both PTL and Aquasprint galas there are four groups known as 'Groups A, B, C, and D'. These groups have set age bands, for example, this season:

#### **AQUASPRINTS**

GROUP A – 2009  
GROUP B – 2008  
GROUP C – 2007  
GROUP D - 2006

#### **PTL**

GROUP A – 2008 & 2007  
GROUP B – 2006 & 2005  
GROUP C – 2004 & 2003  
GROUP D – 2002 & older

As you can see in different leagues a swimmer will be in different age groups, for example, this year a child born in 2007 swims as a Group c Aquasprint swimmer but is still a Group A PTL swimmer.

#### *How is a team selected to compete in the galas?*

The coaches select a team for each gala based on the swimmers general standard of swimming which is observed on a weekly basis and on their times from previous galas or time trials. A minimum number of male and female swimmers in each age group are needed to field a team.

#### *What are time trials?*

We run time trials at various points in the season to keep a record of the speed of individual swimmers in each stroke. We do both 25m time trials and 50m time trials for those that are able. Coaches may also spot check times during a normal coaching session especially if noticeable improvement has been made. At time trials the events will be run much like a gala. Time-keepers (usually parents and helpers) will use stopwatches and record times in each stroke. These times will then be recorded and stored on computer using the hy-tek system – this is basically a team management programme and holds the relevant data for coaches to select a team – name, age, recent times in each stroke. Time trial results are also displayed on the club noticeboard.

#### *How are points awarded to the teams competing in the galas?*

In different leagues points are awarded slightly differently. This is how Aquasprint galas work: for individual events points are awarded for 1<sup>st</sup> place (4 points), 2<sup>nd</sup> (3 points), 3<sup>rd</sup> (2 points) and 4<sup>th</sup> (1 point). The first two swimmers in each team are given points accordingly. Relay events are 7 points for a win and 3 points for a loss. There are 400 points available in total for the gala. As regards league points, it is 3 for a win, 2 for a tie, 1 for a loss and 0 for a forfeited gala.

In PTL galas for individual events points are awarded for 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> place – (7,5,4, and 3 points). The first two swimmers in each team count for points. Relays are worth 14 points for a win and 10 for a loss. There are 600 points available for each gala.

#### *How do you find out the results of a gala?*

The overall scores will be read out immediately after the gala and will be met either with loud cheering or moaning! It is not always obvious at the time which team is winning, for example, a team may win many first places in the individual events so you may think it's in the bag, but if they lose a lot of relays which are worth significantly more points, that can change the entire outcome. As for individual results, these will be available usually a few days after the gala. The events and swimmers names will be listed, alongside their times for the event and any points earned. If they get a first place or a 'PB' it is highlighted and in our club there are awards at the end of the season for the swimmers with the most first places or PB'S.

#### *What is a 'PB'?*

A 'PB' is a 'personal best'. This means it is the fastest time achieved by the swimmer in that particular event to date. Each time they swim an event it can be ascertained if they have achieved a PB because their times are all stored on the hy-tek system. On the results sheet it will also say how many seconds the swimmer has taken off their PB e.g. -1.24 seconds means they have improved their best time by 1.24 seconds.

#### *Who are all the people on poolside at a gala?*

It takes a large group of people to successfully run a gala:

First and foremost – a **full team** of swimmers.

**Announcer** – using the PA system calls out the event number and name.

**Starter** – begins the races with a whistle, calls any false starts, training required.

**Time-Keepers** – 2 per lane, 1 from each team – use stopwatches to record swimmers times – parents and helpers from each club can learn how to do this.

**Touch/Finish Judges** – 1 from each team – record lane numbers and in what place swimmers finish.

**Runners** – collect the time sheets from the time-keepers and bring them to the recording desk – often children, siblings of swimmers.

**Recorders** – 1 from each team - sit at the desk with the computer and input all the times and results, parents/helpers with excel/computer skills.

**Coaches** – on poolside and will advise and direct swimmer to their events. Will watch swimmers compete and use observations to give feedback and inform planning for future coaching.

**Stroke Judges** – 1 from each team – watch swimmers' technique, starts, turns and finishes and ensures that they comply with the Swim Ulster Rules of Swimming. Stroke judges will give feedback to younger swimmers and their coach on an infringement and older more experienced swimmers can be disqualified. Training preferred – helpers can shadow.

**Supervisors/helpers** – helpers to 'marshall/call' the swimmers to the correct races and lanes. Preferably someone who helps at training sessions and knows the swimmers.

**Supporters** – As with any sport, a team will perform better if they are well supported. It makes a huge difference to the swimmers when they see a full gallery of enthusiastic supporters rather than an empty one or a group of people who don't look remotely interested or enthused by how the team is swimming. Everyone can do this.

*Does an individual swimmer make a big difference to the outcome of a gala?*

Short answer, **YES!! A huge difference!!**

This is why: when we select a team, for example for Aquasprints or PTL, as with any sport we will select the best team available from the swimmers in the club. For PTL galas we need 4 boys and 4 girls in each age group to field the relay teams.

If for one age group we do not have that, we basically give up the 28 points that winning those two relays would have been worth. If this happens in two age groups we lose 56 points. So, for example, by two swimmers who are required for swimming relays not showing up to a gala we know we are down 56 points before we even get into the water. **That is a huge and sometimes impossible number of points to make up in the other races.**

In Aquasprints it is similar, relays consist of 2 boys and 2 girls from each age group. If we don't have that we immediately lose the points just like in the PTL and relays are worth a lot of points.

We can swim relays using swimmers from the wrong age groups or in Aquasprints, 3 girls and 1 boy for example, just to give the swimmers a swim, but in both cases, we get no points as it is not considered a qualifying relay.

*What is required of me?*

**Swimmers**- if you are selected for a team, what is required is your **COMMITMENT**. Commitment is a very valuable attribute. We need your commitment to the club, the team and the coaches. **Remember that the club is committed to you** – coaches provide freely of their their time and skills every week to ensure you reach your potential. Sessions are planned and delivered with a lot of thought and effort. **You need to ask yourself, are you, in return, doing everything you can for your team?**

**Younger swimmers** – it is an exciting opportunity and a fresh new dimension to swimming when you are deemed capable to compete for the team – take the opportunity, commit to the team, see what you can achieve and enjoy it.

**Older swimmers** – you are role models for the younger swimmers whether you want to be or not. They look up to you and your attitude has an effect. On poolside at a gala if you are sitting with a negative or defeatist attitude they notice it. If on the other hand you are up cheering on your team, noticing the younger swimmers, learning their names and helping them, that has a hugely positive effect. Basically it's partly what makes us a team, instead of just a group of people all swimming for the same side.

**All team swimmers** – obviously some of our galas are at home in Ballymoney and some are away in other pools. We usually swim equal numbers of both home and away galas in the league. It is expected that if selected, you will swim in both.

### **Home AND Away**

There is an issue here that needs addressing. Historically, we have had a number of swimmers that will attend home galas but refuse to travel to away galas. This is unacceptable. It is a huge let down to the team and the coaches and shows a lack of commitment. It is extremely unfair to the swimmers who go to the away galas and do their best but know the chances of a win greatly reduced all because several team members don't attend. As explained previously it is not only about losing points in individual races, it is about losing a very large number of points because we cannot field a relay team in a particular age group. For all the away galas free transport and supervision are provided.

**Parents** – you have a big role to play in encouraging and supporting your child as they compete for the club. We appreciate you making the effort to get your child to the galas and also when you can offer assistance in running them - that in itself is a boost to your child and the team.

**Dates** – dates for PTL galas are always available at the start of the season – there are only 5 in the season - please take a note of the dates and commit to keeping them free where possible. Aquasprints – the dates come a bit later in the season but still with more than adequate warning to keep them free.

### **Why do we swim in the galas?**

We are a competitive swimming club and therefore learning to swim is just part of the bigger picture.

Competing provides a whole other element to being a member of the club.

Galas are team events where swimmers experience the thrill of competing and having fun. They can also benefit as an individual swimmer by setting their own goals and trying to beat their PB's. Being part of the team can be a great confidence builder.

### **What if I'm not selected for the team, does this mean I can never swim competitively?**

No! Not everyone will always be selected for the team, such is life with any sport, and indeed the same team may not always be selected as swimmers will progress at different rates and we are always checking where changes need to be made on the team.

However, there are plenty of opportunities to compete outside of PTL and Aquasprints galas.

If you have ever noticed a very large and rather full looking calendar on the club noticeboard, you have been looking at the Swim Ulster calendar, listing various swimming meets throughout the season. There are also various other pages displayed about 'Open Meets'.

### **What is a swimming meet? Is that the same as a gala?**

Meets and galas are the same thing. Generally, in Swim Ulster we refer to competitions in the leagues as galas.

There are competitions with events you can enter as an individual representing your team rather than as a member of a whole team in a league gala.

There are different types of swimming meets all with various age groups, events and standards required to enter.

**Open Meet** - the competition is open to any club member.

**Closed Meet** – the competition is not open to everyone, by invitation only, for example a club's own end of season gala would be called a closed meet.

### **Club Open Meets**

These are 'one off' competitions run by a swimming club. Members of other clubs can choose to enter. Information will be sent out about the meet detailing the age groups, events and entry fees (usually £5 per event). This information is always on the club noticeboard under the 'Open Meets' heading and it is circulated on our facebook page. Different meets will be aimed at different age groups, for example, Ards Swimming Club usually run two junior open meets in the season – December and May. They are aimed at swimmers age 9-12. ANY club swimmer of the correct age can enter, whether they have ever been selected for a team gala is irrelevant. These two open meets or any similar, would be suitable for ALL our Monday night swimmers within the age groups.

Usually at club open meets medals are awarded for 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> place in each event.

The results of the events are displayed throughout the gala and are usually available online afterwards.

### Swim Ulster Competition Pathway

There are a lot of different meets as part of what is called the Swim Ulster Competition Pathway. As a swimmer progresses through the competition pathway they will be required to meet various standards and qualifying times to enter the competitions.

At entry level we have: [Swim Ulster Skills Meets](#)

This is a new kind of meet aimed at swimmers age 9-12.

The Long Term Athlete Development Guidelines set by Swim Ireland suggest that athletes in this age category should focus first on the development of agility, balance/buoyancy and co-ordination, basic technique and skills and the development of short speed.

These meets test and award points on various skills such as buoyancy, streamline, kick speed, efficiency of strokes and 'race readiness'.

The skills meets are suitable for our Monday night swimmers.

We had a good turnout of Ballymoney swimmers for the first skills meet this season. If anyone else would like to get involved in the next one, talk to one of the coaches.

### Swim Ulster Development Meets

This is the next stage in the competition pathway. These meets are aimed at swimmers age 10 and over.

The plan is that in the future the swimmers will be required to achieve a skills passport from the skills meet in order to progress to the development meets.

At the development meets swimmers can compete as individuals representing their club in individual events - 50m butterfly, 100m backstroke, 100m breaststroke, 100m freestyle 100m IM and 200m IM.

There are also relay events in which swimmers can represent their club.

Development meets will be run by Swim Ulster officials. These meets are the first introduction to regional racing opportunities for club members. They are to give club members an enjoyable experience of competing and provide them with opportunities to achieve the qualifying times and standards to progress to the next part of the competition pathway.

At these galas swim ulster officials will act as stroke judges – all strokes, starts and turns have to be 'legal' otherwise the swimmer is disqualified. Medals are awarded for 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> place in each event.

Many of our top Monday swimmers and Tuesday senior swimmers have entered and had success at the development meets.

### Qualifying Meets

Once a swimmer has achieved the necessary criteria of times and standards, they can progress to the Swim Ulster Qualifying Meets. These are longer meets with more events and run over 3 days. The swimmer has qualified to be able to enter this kind of meet and at it they will attempt to qualify for other higher level meets such as Regional Championships, Irish division 2 and National competitions.

Ballymoney has had swimmers at all these levels in recent years.

More detailed information on the Swim Ulster competition pathway can be seen on the swim ulster website – [www.swimulster.net](http://www.swimulster.net)

### Officials at meets/galas

When people have experience in helping at league galas they will be able to learn how to carry out various roles at open meets. Swim Ulster provides training for entry level officiating - starting at level 1 time keeping, level 2 stroke judge or turn judge and progressing to referee/starter at regional and National level. Officials may progress to a pre-FINA (the international governing body of swimming) list, and be eligible for selection for level 5 FINA International refereeing.

### What does it mean?

Sometimes when you are reading the websites/noticeboard about upcoming meets there will be jargon that if you're new to competing, might be confusing:

**Hy-tek entries** – if you want to enter a meet you report to a coach who will organize the entry through the hy-tek computer system. This ensures that the swimmer is entered with the correct date of birth and seed time.

**Age-up date** – when you look at meet information there will always be an age up date. The age group the swimmer competes in is the age they are on this date. For example, if the age up date is 31/12/18, and the swimmer will be 10 on that date they compete as a 10 year old. It doesn't matter if they are still 9 until 2 days before the meet or if they will be 11 the day after the meet, the age you are on the age-up date is the age group you compete in.

**Seed-time** – swimmers are 'seeded' into heats in meets. Their recent time or PB will be used as their entry 'seed' time for an event. They will swim in a heat with swimmers of similar speed. This makes the meet much more competitive and improves performance. Heats are swum slowest to fastest – various ages will swim in the same heats as it is done by times.

**Heat declared winners** – heats are swum as mixed age, seeded in slowest to fastest. The swimmer swims the event once. There are no finals. The results are then separated into individual age groups and awarded accordingly. E.g. 12 year olds and 10 year olds may swim in the same heat but on the results sheet their times will be ranked along with everyone who is the same age as them.

**Meet Mobile** – An app that can be purchased. It basically shows all the open meets and the results. You can look up individual swimmers, events and teams. Sometimes it is updated live as the meet takes place. Hopefully this information is useful to you. There is a vast array of competitive opportunities out there for swimmers who want them and are committed to the sport. There are also lots of opportunities for parents to get involved and learn about competitive swimming. Talk to your coaches, take the opportunities, you never know what you could achieve!