**Open Meets**

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**What are Open Meets**

Open Meets are aimed at individual swimmers racing to gain medals, ribbons and new Personal Best times (PBs), which are licensed and appear in the ASA rankings database.

In addition these times can enable the swimmer to qualify for County, Regional or National competitions.

**No other gala provides licensed times that qualify for these higher level competitions**.

Saffron Seals has been taking part in Open Meets for 6 years and has entered swimmers at County level for 3 years.

There are 4 levels of licensed Open Meets with Level 4 being the 'easier' end and Level 1 being the 'top' end.

All these are held under full ASA Laws and Regulations and ASA Technical Rules of Racing - if these are infringed then the swimmer will be disqualified. All Seals swimmers are ASA Level 1 as part of their membership and can upgrade to Level 2 with the appropriate fee.

If you do not already have a time for entry please speak to the Open Meets Manager or Coach and they will give you an estimated time based on previous performance.

**Level 4**: any pool 25m+ can be used; swimmers enter with licensed or unlicensed times; restricted to single club or up to 8 clubs when invited and the event held in one session; results can be used to enter County level events where the County permits it; swimmers can be ASA Level 1 or 2.

**Level 3**: can be in a 25m (short course, SC) or 50m (long course, LC) pool; can enter using licensed or unlicensed times; may have minimum and/or maximum qualifying times for entry; results can be used for Regional or County qualification; swimmers must be ASA Level 2.

**Level 2**: always in a 25m (short course) pool; can only use licensed times to enter; will have minimum qualifying times for entry; results can be used for short course national, Regional and County competition; requires swimmer to be ASA Level 2.

**Level 1**: always in a 50m (long course) pool; can only use licensed times gained in a defined time period before the event to enter; will have minimum qualifying times for entry into the Open Meet; results can be used to qualify for National, Regional and County competition; requires swimmers to be ASA Level 2.

**Other meets**

In addition, some clubs hold unlicensed Novice meets. These are 'friendly' events aimed at inexperienced swimmers who want to get PBs at an 'open meet' style event. They are normally held under relaxed ASA regulations and swimmers are not disqualified for infringement.

Swimmers can be ASA Level 1 and results do not appear on the ASA rankings database. These results cannot be used for higher level competition or for Level 1 or 2 meets.

Confusingly, these are not the same as a novice/entry Level 3 meet where swimmers must be ASA Level 2, may be disqualified, and where times are licensed. Meets advertised as such are given qualifying times that you cannot be faster than and aim to prevent very strong swimmers taking all the medals!

**Higher-level competition**

**County Championships** - open to swimmers aged 10+ in the year of competition by achieving a qualifying time during the preceding 12 months. There are 2 County Championships held each year:

* the **Senior/Junior** competition in November (swimming qualifying times are set for 2 groups under 16 and 17+). Qualifying times are published in July in the year of competition and ages are as at the 31st December in the year of competition.
* the **Age Group County Championships** - held in January/February with qualifying age as at the 31st December in the year of the competition. Qualifying times are published on the ASA website on the 1st September in the year preceding competition. All entries must be licensed and entries must be submitted by the end of the 3rd week of December in the year preceding competition.

**Regional Championships** - open to swimmers aged 11+ held in May with qualifying age as at the 31st December in the year of competition. Qualifying times are published on the ASA website in October of the year preceding competition. All entries must be licensed.

**Home Nation Nationals** - open to swimmers aged 12+ with age at the 31st December in the year of competition. Qualifying swimmers are the top 24 swimmers in each stroke/distance/age group in the ASA rankings database in June in the year of competition. Currently all times have to be achieved at a Level 1 long course meet. Competition is held in August.

**National Championships** - open to swimmers aged 13+ with age at the 31st December in the year of competition. Qualification has to be made at Level 1 long course and the top 24/32 swimmers in the rankings database are selected across the UK. Most qualifying long course meets take place in April and May and the cut-off is in June. Competition is held in August.

**Club participation in Open Meets**

Saffron Seals aims to enter a number of Open Meets each year, and most of our swimmers from Yellow 2 and above can enter. In order to take more than 9 swimmers we have to provide Judge 1 or above qualified officials - usually 1 per 10 swimmers. We currently have 4 qualified officials in the club, and three further officials are training.

In addition we aim to enter 1-2 non-licensed novice meets aimed at our Black and Yellow 1 swimmers - spacing them so that swimmers can refresh their PBs throughout the year. We still have to provide officials but they can include our Judge 1 trainees.

For all entries into Open Meets we must have a Club CRB-checked Team Manager or Coach on poolside with the swimmers.

Between October and December swimmers who have or nearly have County times are invited to more Open Meets in order to qualify. These will be meets with fast minimum cut-off times, i.e. the swimmer must already have a time faster than these to enter. We may only take up to 9 swimmers to each in order to not take officials. These may be by invitation only and will be shared out if over-subscribed.

In March and April swimmers who have near Regional times are invited to long course (50m pool) regional qualifying Open Meets. These have very fast cut-off times and, as swimmers from all over the UK attend, the organisers will only take the fastest entries in each event.

**How Open Meets work**

At Open Meets swimmers are seeded into heats with swimmers of equal speed. This means that 17 year-olds may swim with 11 or 12 year olds in the same heat. Results are then sorted into age groups and the lists are displayed by the pool. Medals are available for the first 3 places.

Open Meets run in sessions, often all day and into the evening with each session taking up to 4 hours. When selecting races for your swimmer you should take into account how long they will 'enjoy' sitting poolside. Many meets do not allow phones or game consoles on poolside with picture capture facilities or unprotected glass screens.

**Swimmers enter a 'whipping area' at least 5 heats before** their race - this is an area where they are sorted into their heats. They then move down the heat holding places until it is their race. It is busy and fast moving, and so swimmers need to be aware of this system and make sure they are in place in time, but Open Meet marshals will support them.

When racing at Level 3 the Coach or Team Manager can normally support the swimmer from the side or shallow end but cannot be present at the start.

**Preparation**

As with league swims it is important that swimmers are prepared for their swim and they take the right kit, snacks and water with them for **EACH SESSION** that they are swimming.

**Please refer to notes at the end of this document**.

**How do I enter and is there a calendar of events?**

Open Meets are licensed 3 months before the event and tend to be published 2 months before the event. While clubs tend to hold an event at the same time each year, this is not always a reliable measure. It is therefore difficult to plan a complete calendar and also the needs of the club's swimmers can alter during the year and we may need to choose events to met this need.

For 2017 we are identifying a calendar of confirmed events offering a range of opportunities. The Open Meets managers will send out the programme for an Open Meet to the relevant development groups when that is appropriate. There will be an entry form and schedule of races.

Parents will need to identify the races their swimmer is entering, complete the entry form with choices and current times. You will need your ASA number, which you can get from <http://www.swimming.org/asa/clubs-and-members/membership-check/>

If you need to upgrade to ASA Level 2 please contact Andy Dunham.

Each race will cost between £5-£7.50 and a flat rate of £2 per swimmer to contribute towards the Coaches passes, which are required for entry.

A date for entries to be received by the club will be given and all monies (payable to SWASC) and entry forms will need to be with the Open Meet Manager by that date. Most meets close their entries when they are full so the club entry date will be before the meet entry date given in the programme - often by several weeks.

All monies are non-refundable so if you cannot swim or decide not to swim you can withdraw but there will be no refund. If an Open Meet is oversubscribed before entries are closed then the meet organiser will reject entries on speed. In this situation fees are returned.

Accepted entries are sent by email or are on the meet organiser's website and Seals swimmers will be directed to the information when published.

Meet day information is often not sent until the Monday before the event and is forwarded to Seals entrants once received.

Swimmers eligible for County level and above will be informed by the Open Meet Manager and asked to decide if they wish to compete. Again a fee per race is charged and is usually between £6.50-£7.50 for this level.

**Parental support and PBs**

Although it is great to win a medal it is not the most important part of attending Open Meets. A new PB or a new time in a distance/stroke that has not been tried before is the main aim. Your swimmer will not always get PBs and the more they swim and compete, the lower the PB will be.

If your swimmer is disqualified or has a disappointing swim please be positive and supportive. If their coach is not poolside then encourage your child to discuss their swim - good and bad - at their next training session.

**Preparation**

It is important that swimmers are prepared before any Open Meet.

**Parents are responsible for getting their child to the Meet**, so please make sure you are clear where the pool is and arrive in plenty of time to allow your child to change, and sign in ready to start the warm up.

Ideally swimmers should not eat a large meal less than 2 hours prior to the swim - regular snacks throughout the day are ideal and swimmers should also be well rested.

As swimmers go poolside without parents, please make sure your child is aware of how they are getting home and where to meet you.

Pack swimming bags in advance - swimmers will need the following for EACH session

* Club swimwear (ideally with a spare costume for warm up)
* Goggles
* Club hat
* 2 x towels (1 for poolside)
* T-bag top for poolside + hoody and track pants/shorts (helps to keep muscles warm)
* Plenty to drink but no fizzy drinks or glass bottles poolside
* Snacks - send your child with sensible snacks (crackers, muesli bars, Jaffa cakes) - most swimmers also bring some jelly sweets or jelly cubes for energy prior to their race - a helpful tip is to put snacks into tubs
* Change for lockers

We recommend that you bring spares of items such as goggles, swimwear and hats in case of last-minute hitches.

**At the pool**

**It is really important that swimmers arrive on time** - they need time to register, get poolside and have a warm-up swim.

**On arrival swimmers need to sign in - usually there will be a Seals Marshall** who will be in the entrance lobby or poolside and wearing a yellow Seals top.

Swimmers go poolside on their own, where there will be an allocated area to sit. Swimmers need to stay in this area while waiting for their races. Marshalls (parent helpers) will be poolside with a race schedule and will call swimmers up for their races. Some swimmers like to know their races beforehand and write their race numbers on their hand or arm to remember.

Sessions often last 3-4 hours so some swimmers bring small poolside activities such as cards and top trumps to amuse themselves. But please note that Seals cannot take responsibility for these items and some pools have a ban on any electronic games, phones, etc.

**Spectators**

Typically spectators pay £1.50-3.00 for entry. Often clubs will sell raffle tickets, programmes and cakes to fundraise for the home club. It is often very hot and cramped, so you will need plenty of fluids and layered clothing.

**The Open Meet**

All swimmers do a warm-up. This usually takes around 30 minutes and swimmers are encouraged to keep moving at a steady pace and to practice their turns and finishes. Generally it starts with younger swimmers and progresses to the older ones. If there's time they it is followed by diving practice.

Once the races start, they progress very quickly.

All races are run according to ASA laws and rules and there is a set schedule of events including individual races and relays.

Every race gives the swimmer an opportunity to:

* Improve their experience in competition
* Gain a Personal Best (PB) time

We are a very friendly club and most of the older swimmers will spend time with the younger ones poolside, giving them tips and encouraging them too. Cheering teammates on is encouraged as is parents cheering for Seals!

During the races swimmers will be instructed by a series of whistles:

1. Four short blasts of a whistle means that the referee and officials are ready to start the race. Swimmers need to have their goggles on and at this point **everyone (swimmers and spectators) must be quiet** so the swimmers can hear instructions clearly.
2. The long whistle means that swimmers move onto the blocks (backstroke swimmers enter the water)
3. 'Take your marks' means that swimmers take up their starting position.
4. When all swimmers are stationary the starter sounds the starting signal.

Swimmers need to pay particular attention to their starts, turns and finishes. They need to be mentally and physically ready, as races will not be held for missing swimmers or forgotten goggles. For this reason we usually send swimmers up to their race in advance.

At the end of their race, swimmers must remain in the water until instructed to get out by the officials.

Marshalls will keep an eye on all swimmers, but we cannot take responsibility for swimmers who wander off. Swimmers are asked not to leave the poolside without first informing a marshal. We also politely ask that swimmers behave at the events including being quiet at the start of the races - please remind swimmers that they have been invited to represent our club poolside as well as while racing.

When your child has finished their races you make take them home - please make sure that he/she tells a Seals Marshall first so that they can be signed out. Results of races will be posted on the walls at the event.

Results, PB and new times and sprint awards will be posted on the Seals website (Results tab) as soon as possible. Sprint badges can be purchased from our Awards Coordinator (awards@saffronseals.org.uk) for a small fee. Qualifying times for sprint badges can be found under the Club Records, PBs and Awards tab on the website.

For further information please contact the Open Meets Manager (omteammanager@saffronseals.org.uk)