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**A Guide to EML Gala Swimming at Saffron Seals.**

Attending a gala for the first time can be a daunting experience for both swimmer and parent. Hopefully this information will help make it a positive and successful one.

**What is EML?**

The Essex Mini League provides a framework for competition between swimming clubs within Essex with as many as 18 clubs taking part – each club competing in five rounds from seven. The league operates much like a football league, with points being accrued for final results from every gala.

EML is aimed at swimmers who are new to competition or not regular open meet attendees. Upper time limits are set for each race and swimmers must finish within the time limit or they are issued a time fault and do not score points for their club. These upper time limits are set in line with Essex Age Group qualifying times. EML therefore offers the more novice members of the Club the opportunity to experience competition and the Coach and Team Manager together work very hard to select the right swim squad for these events, taking into account the times each swimmer has already achieved. On occasions some swimmers who have County qualifying times will take part, but these swimmers will only compete in a stroke that is not their preferred option.

**How is the EML team chosen?**

The EML squad is not a fixed team: it is fluid to allow as many swimmers as possible the opportunity to compete and improve but obviously we still aspire to improve our position in the league! Also, each round of the league has an ‘age on date of gala’ restriction and it is possible that some swimmers will be selected early in the season but not later on, purely due to the fact that they have had a birthday and therefore a change in age group.

When choosing the team we will consider:

* Times/PBs
* Attitude during training
* Behaviour and approach at Galas, Open Meets, Club events
* Availability when selected, and response to selection email
* A balanced team to meet the age, stroke and distance criteria

We will also take into account the commitment of swimmers to turn up to past events when picking teams for the future.

**How will I know if my child has been selected?**

Approximately one month prior to each fixture the EML Coach will pull together a list of swimmers. The EML Team Manager will then send an email invitation through GroupSpaces. To ensure you receive such communications please check that you have registered with GroupSpaces (see your Membership Pack for instructions how to do this) and add emlteammanager@saffronseals.org.uk and leefy32@gmail.com to your address book. This is important as some invitations have been known to arrive in the spam folder!

**If your child is invited please make every effort to be available.**

Please reply to any invitations ASAP, as time is needed to find replacement swimmers and re-allocate races. If you do not reply within the time frame given it will be assumed that your child cannot swim and another child will be invited.

Once all replies have been received, swimmers are allocated to races. If there is sufficient time this list is published in advance, together with the final arrangements regarding venue, warm-up and start times. Swimmers are always keen to know what races they have been selected for but sometimes may be asked to swim a stroke that is not a favourite or best. There is always a good reason for this decision, so parents, please encourage your swimmer to try their best.

After confirming your place, if your child is sick, or cannot swim, or if you encounter traffic problems and are going to be late, please contact the Coach or Team Manager whose details will be included in the email invitation.

**Gala Preparation**

Preparation is an important factor before a gala and this information is aimed at helping your child achieve their best.

Parents are responsible for getting their child to the gala. Make sure you know where the pool is, and that you 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 two hours before they swim. Regular snacks throughout the day are ideal. Swimmers should also be well rested.

Please make sure your child is aware of how they are getting home from the gala and where to meet you.

Pack swimming bags in advance. Swimmers will need:

* **Appropriate swimwear**
* **Goggles**
* **Club swimming hat**

(We recommend bringing spares in case of last minute hitches!)

* **Towel x 2** (one to take poolside)
* **T-bag top** for poolside - keeping your muscles warm helps you swim better
* **Plenty to drink** – it is important to keep well hydrated, but no fizzy drinks or glass poolside
* **Snacks** – please send your child with sensible snacks (crackers, muesli bars, Jaffa cakes) A helpful tip is to put these into tubs!
* **Change for lockers**

**At the Pool**

Arrival on time is vital. It is essential that all swimmers have a warm up. Swimmers must present themselves to the Team Manager (or another designated Club member/parent helper) to sign in. Look out for a yellow Seals top either in the entrance lobby or poolside.

**Swimmers**

Swimmers should go poolside on their own. If your child is nervous or unsure what to do let us know and we will buddy them up with an older Seals swimmer. We do ask our more experienced swimmers to mentor, encourage and show the way for the younger swimmers

Each competing club will have a designated area to sit in, and swimmers need to stay in our area while waiting for their races.

There will be parent helpers poolside (marshals) who will have a race schedule and will call swimmers up for their races accordingly. However some swimmers like to know what they are swimming beforehand and write their race numbers on their hand/arm to remember.

The gala usually lasts around 2 hours so some swimmers bring small poolside activities such as cards, Top Trumps, etc to amuse themselves. Please note the Club cannot take responsibility for these items, and water doesn’t always mix well with electronics!

We start with the warm-up. This usually takes about 30 minutes. Swimmers are encouraged to keep moving at a steady pace and remember to practice their turns and finishes. Generally we start with the younger ones, then older ones, followed by diving practice if time permits.

Once the races start they progress very quickly!

The races and gala are run according to Swim England Laws & Regulations and Technical Rules of the disciplines. There is a set list of events, which include individual races and relays and swimmers compete in age appropriate races: 9 years (relays only), 10 years & under, 11 years & under, 13 years & under, Open Age Group.

Every race will give the swimmer the opportunity to:

* Improve their experience in competition
* Gain possible swimming sprint awards
* Gain a Personal Best (PB) time, a record of which is kept by the club
* Make new friends

During the Gala the Coach is usually at the starting blocks to reassure, instruct and encourage swimmers. The Team Manager (or another designated Club member/parent helper) will be at the opposite end boosting them on and instructing the relay teams. We are a very friendly team and most of the older swimmers will spend time with the younger ones poolside, giving them tips and encouraging them too. Generally there is a great atmosphere, which generates real team spirit. Cheering teammates on is encouraged! – parents’ cheering for Seals swimmers is also appreciated!!

At the beginning of each race swimmers will be instructed as follows …

1. Four long blasts of a whistle indicate the Referee and Judges are ready to start the race.

**Get your goggles on!**

At this point everyone (swimmers and spectators) must be quiet so the swimmers can hear instructions clearly.

2. On the next long whistle swimmers should take up their starting position either on the starting block, on the poolside or in the water. Backstroke swimmers should enter the water.

3. When told to “Take your marks” swimmers immediately take up their starting position. 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 for their race as officials will not hold the race for missing swimmers or forgotten goggles. For this reason we usually send swimmers up for their race in advance.

As well as calling them for their races the Seals poolside helpers will keep an eye on all the swimmers. Swimmers are asked not leave the poolside without first informing a marshal (we don’t want anyone to miss their race) but we cannot take responsibility for swimmers that wander off.

We also politely ask that swimmers behave at these events, including being quiet at the start of races. Marshals cannot be expected to repeatedly remind swimmers of their behaviour – please remind your child that they are representing our Club, poolside as well as while racing.

When your child has finished their races you may take them home. If you wish to leave before the end, when the places/points are announced, please make sure your child tells a Seals marshal/parent helper that they are leaving so that they can be signed out.

Results, times, PB times and sprint awards achieved will be published via GroupSpaces and also posted on the Seals website (Results). Sprint award badges, awarded for achieving particular times for each stroke (the times required can be found on the website under Club Records, Personal Best (PB) Times and Awards) can be purchased for a small fee. Please contact the Awards Co-ordinator awards@saffronseals.org.uk.

**Spectators**

Typically you will need to pay to enter. This is usually £2.50-£3.00. Sometimes the home club will sell raffle tickets, programmes and cakes to raise extra funds. You will also need plenty of fluids and layered clothing – as it gets VERY hot poolside! Some pools have limited seating too, so be prepared to be cramped.

**Finally, a message from your Team Manager**

I think I’ve covered everything you need to know. However, if you have any further questions, or anything needs further explanation I am happy to receive emails or talk to people poolside. I am usually watching sessions Tues.2, Fri.1 and Sat.1.

If your child does not wish to compete in gala competitions please could you let me know.

Lastly I look forward to meeting many of you and your swimmers at future EML galas.

**GO SEALS!!!**

**Leefy Hindle**

**EML Team Manager**

emlteammanager@saffronseals.org

07860 462853

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