

Backwell Swimming Club



A Rough Guide to...the 'Somersets'

Having spent the past week's training sessions handing out entry cards to the Somersets, it has become clear to me that we have many swimmers (and parents) who have not competed in an 'Open' before and who therefore have little or no idea what to do, where to go and perhaps even how they came to be entered. I have done my best to answer queries, but rather than explain the same thing twenty times, to 20+ parents, missing out something different each time, I thought I'd spend my Sunday evening writing out a note that might help those new to the Somersets and Open Meetings in general. Usually, during the competition itself, there would be several senior swimmers ('old hands' at Opens) present at the Somersets to help the younger swimmers, but the way that the events have been organised this year, the under 12s will be swimming in a separate session from other swimmers. As a result the Chief Coach may need help from a parent or two to organise the swimmers

The following advice is based on 4-5 years experience of taking my own children to Opens and helping out at the last couple of WEST Open Meets, so even if there are errors in the theory of what should happen, it represents good practical experience of what **does** happen. I would appreciate it if those swimmers who have competed in previous Somersets and Opens who read this could check it for errors and omissions (and let me know what they are) as I hope to include something along the same lines in a Club Handbook, for distribution to new Club members next year.

How did you get here?

Club swimmers take part in two types of competition, Galas and Opens. In Galas the Club is invited to enter a team for a single or a League competition. Swimmers will be selected by the Club Coach (Joe Herowych) and Team Manager (position vacant) and will compete as part of the Club team, scoring points for their position in each event, the total points scored by the Club determining its position in the Competition/League. For Open Meets swimmers enter on an individual basis, although still representing the Club, and compete against swimmers from many other Clubs to achieve better PBs and perhaps to win medals, cups, etc. The Somerset Age Groups and Championships are this type of event, but only swimmers born in, or living in, Somerset are eligible to enter.

For Galas the Team Manager will post a list of swimmers selected for the event on the Notice Board, a week or two before the event, so that swimmers can confirm their availability. For Open Meets (and the Somersets), the entry details, date time, etc of events are posted on the Notice Board, with a sheet for swimmers to complete to indicate which events they want to enter. Note that the "Closing Date" indicated on the entry form is usually the date when entries have to be with the meet organiser, so to allow time for the completion of official entry forms, entry of details on computer, etc., entries normally have to be on the Club Notice Board about a week earlier than the "official" closing date.

This was the case with the Somersets, where entries had to be with the organiser by 1st Feb., so I am afraid that those who came to me with late entries, on or after 1st Feb., did not get accepted. Although some swimmers listed their entries on the Notice Board, many others were added after discussions with the Club Coach and Andrea Orr, during the recent time trials, which also provided the times for the entries. I combined all entries from all sources on a computer disk using special software provided by the Somerset ASA. The computer disk and a cheque for the entry fees were sent to Somerset ASA, and in due course, ie last week, I received back entry cards for those swimmers who had been accepted. In some Open Meets the number of entries is restricted by limiting the number of entries in each event, by introducing minimum entry times or by accepting entries on a first come, first served basis. None of these techniques have been used for the Somersets, but the large number of entries in some events/age groups has resulted in some rescheduling, so you should check your entry card to confirm the date and time you are swimming. Some of our entries were rejected, because entries were submitted in age groups that were not eligible eg over 12 years for 100m IM. Again check your entry cards to confirm for which events you have been accepted. I have been distributing entry cards this week and will continue this next week. Do not lose your card(s)! You must take it(them) with you on the day you are swimming.

I have placed on the Notice Board a list of all entries, so swimmers can check when they and their friends/team-mates are swimming, and perhaps arrange to share lifts, etc. Along with the entry cards I am distributing invoices to advise you of the entry fees which you owe the Club. Please arrange to pay these as soon as possible, bring the invoice with your cheque as this will be signed as your receipt.

Preparation

The best preparation for the Somersets (or any other competition) is to attend as many of the Club training sessions as possible. The Club Coach (Joe) has arranged the training sessions to prepare you for the competition, with particular emphasis on starts and turns to sharpen your performance and give you the best chance of a PB. He will also be able to answer any questions you may have. All swimmers are expected to wear Club costumes and hats, and a Club T-shirt between events, so please make sure you have them. You will also need **properly fitting** goggles, which stay on your eyes, not drop to your chin or into your mouth when you dive in, and a good supply of towels. You should also bring a spare set of costume, hat, goggles, etc in case of loss or breakages, or to change into if there is a long gap between events. You will also need to bring drinks (in a proper bottle) and snacks. Ask Joe if you need advice on what to bring to eat and what to eat before the competition - roast beef, Yorkshire pudding and 2 veg for Sunday lunch is probably not a good idea if you want to swim a PB Sunday afternoon!

On the Day

The Somersets take place over 4 weekends in March. The first weekend (3/4 March) all events are held at Hutton Moor Leisure Centre, W-s-M, the second weekend (17/18 March) at Millfield School, Street and the final weekend (24/25 March) back at Hutton Moor. You will need to be at the pool **at least** 15 minutes before the time shown on the **bottom** of the entry card for "warm up and card posting". When you arrive at the pool, post your cards for the next session in the correct box (blue for boys and pink for girls - who said the ASA were not a modern, progressive organisation!). At Hutton Moor the card posting boxes are usually in the low level area next to the small pool and at Millfield the boxes are usually in the main entrance, in front of the trophy cabinet. If you have cards for more than one session, make sure you post the right card(s). At some Open events you can post all cards for the day (which may include 3 or more sessions) at the start of the day, but I don't think you can do this for the Somersets! Once you've posted your card(s), get changed and find your team mates, who will be sitting on the seats on the right hand side of the pool, above the female changing rooms, at both Hutton Moor and Millfield - look for Joe, the Club costumes and Club flag.

At Hutton Moor and Millfield, parents (and other supporters) can sit on the banked seats on the left side of the pool. Access to these is via the 1st Floor Café at Hutton Moor and via the stairs to the left of the main entrance at Millfield. Somerset ASA charge an entrance fee, which may include a programme, or this may be extra. If you are only stay for one or two sessions you may be entitled to a refund of part of the entrance fee.

Warm up will start at the time shown on the bottom of the entry card, which is also the time when the card posting boxes close. Warm-up usually takes place in stages, so be certain to listen to the announcer so you know when to get in the pool and which lanes to use. Alternate lanes usually swim clockwise/anti-clockwise, so again listen to the announcer to find out which way your lane has to swim. Usually diving is not permitted in warm-up lanes, so jump or climb into the water - be careful not to dislodge or damage the automatic timing boards. Warm-up lanes are usually crowded, so be careful, particularly on the turns. One or more of the warm-up lanes may be designated as a "sprint lane" (listen to the announcer), which means it will be used in one direction only, with swimmers diving into the pool off the blocks and sprinting one length before climbing out. If using a sprint lane, be sure to leave enough time after the previous swimmer so you do not dive on top of him (or her) or catch him (or her) up. After your warm up return to the swimmers seats, dry yourself and put on T-shirt, etc to keep warm and wait until your event is "called".

Waiting.... waiting....waiting....

Most of an Open meeting is spent waiting for your event, so be sure to take something to do - preferably not something too valuable, as security can be a problem. A book to read, radio/Walkman to listen to (if you have someone to leave it with when you swim), Gameboy (ditto) or homework to do (if you want to impress the

parents), but remember it may (!) getwet. You will also need a drinks bottle and possibly suitable snacks to eat - but don't eat them all in the ten minutes before you swim.

When the card posting boxes close the competition organisers will collect all the entry cards from the boxes and sort them by event and into competitor order (slowest first, fastest last). Some entries will almost inevitably not have turned up because of sickness, injury, forget fullness or because they overslept. Those who have posted their cards will be divided into heats, normally with 6 or 8 swimmers per heat, depending on the number of lanes at the pool. The first one or two heats may have fewer swimmers, as it is unlikely that all heats will be fully "populated". This system means you will be swimming against others who have submitted similar times to the best you have achieved, so you should have a good, competitive race.

Before the start of the competition, and then at least one event in advance of the event being swum, competitors will be told by the announcer to go to the marshalling area to collect their cards. Be sure to take your goggles, swim hat, etc with you, as you will not have time to go back to your seat. At Hutton Moor the marshalling area is normally the low level area in front of the pool and at Millfield the open area just inside the main doors to the pool. In the marshalling area the marshals will call out the swimmers' names and hand out the cards - make sure you get your own card back, not someone with the same, or similar sounding name. The cards will now show which heat and in which lane you will swim (second line down at the top of the card).

The marshalls will organise the swimmers into groups of 6 or 8 for each heat, the groups being seated in rows in the marshalling area. As heats are completed the groups will move forward one row of seats at a time, then down the side of the pool (in one or two stages) and round the back of the starting blocks. Make sure that you end up at the start of the correct lane as shown on your card. When the swimmers in front of you are under the Referee's or Starters orders, do not move or talk. Keep well behind the blocks until it is your heat.

When the heat before yours is underway remove your T-shirt (there is usually a box or chair to put your clothes on) and put on your goggles, etc. Move up to the blocks and hand your card to the lane official. Do not get on the blocks until the previous heat is finished and the Referee blows his whistle and raises his arm to instruct you to get on the blocks. Normally, swimmers from the previous heat will leave the pool before you get on the blocks, but if time is tight, the starts may be "over-the-top", ie the next heat starts while the previous swimmers are still in the water. When you are on the blocks follow the Referee/Starters orders. At Hutton Moor and Millfield the Starter will normally use the electronic starter, which gives a quite "burp", so listen carefully. If the electronic system fails the Starter may use a gun, or if that fails a whistle! When you finish make sure you hit the timing boards hard.

When you have swum your heat (make sure you know the stroke you are swimming and the distance/number of lengths) stay in the water until all other swimmers have finished and the Referee tell you to leave the pool. If "over-the-top" starts are being used make sure you hold on to the lane ropes, not the timing boards, while the next heat starts - **and keep still in the water**. When the Referee tells you to leave the pool, get out by the steps at the side, passing under, not over, any lane ropes between your lane and the steps. Do not under any circumstances climb out over the timing boards! Collect your belongings from behind the blocks and return to the swimmers seats. If the Referee asks to talk to you, listen to what he says - he will be trying to help you by pointing out any weakness or potential problem areas that you have - not telling you off! Please make a note of, or ask your parents to note, the times you have achieved as I will not be able to attend all sessions and need the times for the Club's database and the ASA awards scheme.

Good Luck

Finally, Good Luck in all your events - I hope you all achieve PBS, but even if you do not, have fun. All of the above may sound daunting, but after a couple of Opens you'll get the hang of things and will be teaching the new Club swimmers the ropes.

Brian Harbord
Membership Secretary

25 February 2001