

Race day

A previous article has already covered pre-race preparation covering topics such as nutrition, what you need to take and warm up. This piece covers what happens on race day.

Arrival - Obviously you will need to arrive in good time with all your kit. Most people arrive before the doors open so there will usually be a large number of people waiting outside. At most galas it is usual to let the swimmers in first with parents following around 15 minutes later, so be prepared to go in on your own. If this is one of your first galas or you are a little nervous it may be a good idea to find a friend and go in together.

Registration - this differs from gala to gala. For some galas you are provided with cards and are required to post them on arrival, there are usually trays or boxes marked with the event number and you will need to put your entry cards into the correct box. At Middlesex events you are usually required to sign in. The signing in table is usually very close to where you come on to poolside from the changing rooms and will probably be hidden from view by a scrum of other swimmers all trying to sign in. When you get to the table you will need to give the person your name, sometimes your club name (Hillingdon) and the event numbers you have entered. It's a good idea to have all this written down on a piece of paper. At other galas you will not even need to sign-in, these are usually pre-heated events. This means that the heat and lane you will be swimming in will have been allocated before you arrive at the gala. One drawback of this system is that if a swimmer doesn't turn up there will be an empty lane.

Warm-up - Not everyone warms up at the same time, there are set times so you need to know when you are expected to warm up. The reason everyone can't warm up at the same time is that there would be too many swimmers in the pool and you wouldn't be able to move let alone swim. Usually the boys and the girls will warm up separately. Sometimes younger swimmers will warm up before older swimmers, as happens at HSC club galas. Be prepared warm ups can be very crowded. Please try and keep moving do not stop at the end for a chat.

When its time for your warm up, select a lane, usually a number of swimmers from a club will warm up in the same lane together but there will be swimmers from other clubs with you. You will need to jump into the water, do not dive. Before starting to swim make sure you know which way round you are swimming. At some point during you warm up 'sprint lanes' may be opened. These are 1-way lanes where swimmers start with a dive, swim 1 length and climb out. If electronic timing is being used, you will see large yellow boards at the end of the pool do not climb out over the boards but at the side of the pool.

Whipping - if the gala has been pre-heated you may know which heat and lane you will be swimming in and it will be your responsibility to get to the start in

time. Otherwise you may have to go through the process known affectionately as 'whipping'. There will be an announcement asking for all swimmers in event 'X' to go report to whipping. The coaches will be listening to this and will make sure you go to the whipping area, unless you have wandered off somewhere. There can be a large number of people at whipping at anyone time, I have seen nearly 200 swimmers report to whipping for a single event. In the whipping area the Clerks of the course as FINA would like them to be known, or 'whips' as we call them will put you into race order, tell you what lane you are in and send you down to the starting area in time for your race. If the event is a carded event you will probably need to collect your card that you posted on arrival, this will now be updated with the heat number and lane. You will need to give this to the timekeeper on your lane.

Pre-race - The whips will ensure you leave the whipping area and get to the starting area in time for your race, but you do need to listen to what they say. When you get to the starting area you will have to walk to the lane you will be swimming in usually whilst the heat before yours is being raced. You will be able to place your towel/t-bag/shoes near the timekeeper.

The race - usually races will have 'over the top' starts. This means that the swimmer from the previous race will still be in the water when you start your race. Obviously this does not apply to backstroke races. The Referee will blow a series of short whistle blasts. This is the signal for you to take off any remaining clothes, make sure your goggles are on and to stand by the block. Next the announcer will announce the heat. The Referee will then blow 1 long blast on the whistle, this is your signal to get onto the block. When the Referee is happy they will hold their arm out. This is the signal to the starter that the Referee is passing control of the race over to the starter. The starter will then say 'Take your marks' and when everyone is still the starting signal will be given.

After the race - stay in the water until the Referee tells you to climb out. Then get out by the sides, not by climbing out over the timing boards and go and collect anything you may have left by the timekeeper's chair. Next go and speak with your coach and then if there is a warm down pool have a warm down swim. Once everyone in your event has swum the results will be posted. Hopefully you will have swum a PB and maybe even medalled.