**The first few meets**

**Written by a parent who previously had no experience of swimming!!**

Given the regular questions we receive such as what should we bring, what do we do about the early swim meets from parents etc. I thought I should write a few notes down, to try and help. As your child progresses, the information here will be far different as the coaches and or your child will tell you what’s needed. I just hope that the notes give a bit of an idea for the children/parents in the development squads.

Remember you can ask any parents for advice; all have been where you are.

**What’s the point in the first swim meets?**

The earlier your child goes to the available meets (they’re not galas apparently) the quicker they adjust to competition swimming. They are not a test, it plays no part in moving the child’s squad etc. It’s just a way to familiarise the swimmers with what will be expected of them later on. Once the nerves go they will see it as fun. It’s definitely worth entering them into them. TD is a competitive swim club so later on they are expected to race.

In some of the early meets, everyone gets a medal so it’s their first bit of bling to take to school too.

The main goal should be to just enter the pool and get a time, anything else doesn’t matter; that in itself is a big ask when you’re little!

They can easily do the race, the new bit to do is to get into the water while being watched by a crowd of spectators.

**The procedure**

Drop them to the changing rooms 15 mins before the warm up. They get changed, walk through to the pool, find their coach/mates and grab a seat. All clubs are usually sat together in the same place so find a Torfaen Dolphins shirt and head that way.

They will then be told when to enter the pool for warm up, these are usually split on age/sex etc. so there maybe be 2 or 3 sets of warm ups, they will be in one of those groups. The coach will tell them and usually accompany them at the end of the lane. There’s around 5- 10 swimmers in the warm up lanes and they do nothing but a few lengths just to loosen up and get wet. It helps prevent injury for when they go as fast as they can later.

After the warm up, they should put a t shirt/hoody on over the costume to stay warm.

Out come the officials, they are the ones in the white tops with clipboards.

In the early meets there’s an example of how to start the race so they can hear the beeper etc. when to dive or to push off from the wall if they’re not confident of diving yet.

Then some of the swimmers get called to marshalling, the coaches sort this and give them a prep talk too. They sort swimmers into the heats and position them around the pool. As each race happens a marshal moves the waiting heats forward. Your child will be accompanied by marshals the whole way and so you won’t be worrying that they don’t know what to do and neither will they!

Your child races. They get out and return to the coaches, for high 5’s and a little advice. They wait around for an hour (with t-shirt on to stay warm) then get called to marshalling when they are up again.

Make sure they tell the coach if they are leaving pool side.

So on a day it looks a little like this:

Warm up.

Session 1

Break

Warm up

Session 2

Break

Warm up

Session 3

And home!!!

Your child might not be in every session, depending on the races you have entered them in. Your start time in the day maybe session 2, therefore you do not need to turn up until the start of session 2 warm up. If they’re not in session 3 you can leg it early.

**What will my child need:**

To swim: Cap, goggles, normal costume and spares if you have them (they always seem to break on competition day!).

Two bottles of water/squash.

Food/snacks, later on nutrition becomes important, right now just think school packed lunch, sandwich, crisps, fruit. We get the rice crispy squares, they are a treat and filling. Personally we go for no chocolate as it melts into a mush and you end up having to clean up a bag of mess when they give up eating it half way through.

Two towels, one to wrap up in during the day and one to dry at the end.

Two sets of outer clothing, they will get one set wet, the 2nd you need at the end of the day to travel home.

Flipflops.

Label everything!!!!!

They **don’t** need fins, floats or anything training related.

**What do I need to attend?**

Cash, about £10-20. There’s a spectators entry fee around £5-7 for the day and you probably want a programme. There’s usually someone selling raffle tickets too.

Stuff for you to do. It’s a long stint. I volunteer to help, it helps the day go faster

Its really hot in every pool you visit, so dress appropriately. Be prepared to be slow cooked to death.

Snacks and drinks for you, there’s usually a café at the meets too.

We normally attend one parent at a time, we’ve two children and bringing the younger one for the entire day is a little tough, so if we can get some baby sitting cover we can both go. If you are bringing siblings, loads of colouring, charged iPad etc. think of a long day travelling. It’s in no way that kids aren’t welcome, its just a long day for you and a massive long day for them. All the screen time rules go straight out of the window.

Bring a pen or highlighter for marking your child’s race and probably an extra one for me.

**The heats/understanding the programme.**

In the early meets it’s a heat declared winner. This means that all the 9 year olds will have the times put together and their places be put in order regardless of heat finishing place. There is no final. Same for 10 year olds etc.

So, the first heats are usually people with a NT (no time) next to their name, then in the 2nd meet they will have a time allocated from the first. These are placed in time order. Don’t worry if your child is with older children they are either too fast for their age or the elder one has no time, it’s irrelevant to their final place.

I need a coffee have I got time? This is now my main use of a programme. I round up the races before my daughter swims, see the times of the swimmers. Then work out if I think I can make it.

5 heats of 100m free, average time 1:41. I round it to 2mins a race and that gives me 10 minutes.

The end results are usually printed and stuck to a wall in the viewing area. About 20- 30 mins after all the heats for that race are finished.

**Getting your child and you prepared.**

A decent nights sleep, it’s a long day so I think this is the most important. They don’t have to be really early, just a decent nights kip, again just like you are travelling all of the next day.

This is their first meet, it’s important that you manage your child’s as well as your expectations. Remember they are little and the achievement here is getting them into the pool to race. So every time they enter a pool in front of 200 people, they are doing awesome; be proud of them for that.

I found that a little bribe works here, naturally your child will want/expect medals and an immediate call up for the Olympic team. Reign them in. It’s their first meet and they will get DQ’s (Disqualifications) etc. A realistic target for 5 races would be to get no more than 2-3 DQ’s for MC’Ds dinner, getting times for half your races is an achievement and they feel they’ve won a McDonald’s from you. It stops them being devastated when a DQ happens and it will happen.

It should be a celebration of their hard work and your juggling skills in getting them this far.

**FAQ,**

**Can I see my child during the breaks?**

Yes if they wish to come out and see you, you are not allowed poolside. Some stay to be with friends and some come out to see you. You never know.

**My child looks worried should I go see them?**

Nope let the coaches and the big swimmers help them, that’s what they are there for. If the coach feels it’s needed they will find you. The children do get upset sometimes but in 99% of the cases the coaches can handle it. Once they finish the first race the worry is normally long gone.

**My child’s been DQ’d by the fun police why? What can I do?**

Nothing you can do, it’s for a reason and the coach will be informed of it you can expect some in the early days. It doesn’t mean they cheated or got an advantage but it does mean they’ve done something wrong. It’s nothing more than the new target for the next meet being don’t get DQ’d from that one again!

The main reasons:

Took a flier, its fairly obvious that one.

Wrong stroke, (kicking a little during Breaststroke etc.)

Turns or finishing. (single handed touch on breast or fly is really common - must be two handed)

Just laugh it off and marvel that they were brave enough to get in and race. My daughter was DQ’d in two races of her first comp. even managed to come up in the wrong lane after a turn.

**Can I cheer my child?**

Hell yes! You must be quiet for the start of every race then cheer them on, better still cheer every dolphin on. Don’t use a camera with a flash, it causes false starts.