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WINCHESTER CITY PENGUINS

SWIMMING CLUB
(Affiliated to South East Swimming, Hampshire County ASA & MPAGB)

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BAGCATS stands for **British Age Group CAtegorieS** and applies to boys aged 9 to 14 and girls aged 9 to 13.

Over the year, there are three standard competitions, in which the system is used,

County BAGCATS and County Development Open Meet BAGCATS

Also commonly known as the "Hampshires or Counties", normally held over two/three weekends in February/March at various pools in Hampshire. The pools that will probably be used are The Quays Southampton, Havant & Waterlooville, Aldershot and the Mountbatten Centre Portsmouth.

There are entry times/qualifying times for this competition that may be achieved at any licensed open meet* (gala).

Age range for this competition is Boys 9-14 and Girls 9-13.

Regional BAGCATS

Known as the "Districts" and also known as "Regionals", held across two weekends in June at the K2 Pool, Crawley a long course (50m) pool.

There are entry times for this competition that must be achieved at any Level 1, 2 or 3 open meet*.

Age range for this competition is Boys 10-14 and Girls 10-13.

National BAGCATS

Commonly known as "Nationals", held across four days in July at Ponds Forge, Sheffield, a long course (50m) pool.

There are entry times for this competition that must be achieved at any Level 1 or 2 open meet*.

Age range for this competition is Boys 11-14 and Girls 11-13.

As you would expect, the entry times for each competition gets progressively tougher through the County, Regional and National competitions. All entry qualifying times are available on the club website and notice boards. They will also be found on the County, District and ASA website

* The ASA run a system for licencing open meets. Depending on the quality of the pool, timing equipment and officials, a meet may be granted a Level 1, 2, 3 or 4.

The swimmers age in each competition is as at the last day of each competition. It may therefore be that a swimmer is in the 12 year old category for County BAGCATS and 13 year old for Regionals and Nationals. Until recently all competitions were based on age as at 31st Dec which clearly benefited swimmers with birthdays early in the year. The newer system of age on day removes this advantage and allows all swimmers to be nearer the older end of their age group for at least one of the three competitions.

BAGCATS is a points system for establishing who the best swimmers really are within their age group at a particular competition. It also promotes swimmers competing in a variety of strokes in accordance with Long Term Athlete Development. There is an ASA document that fully explains Long Term Athlete Development related to the Journey through Swimming.

In the days before BAGCATS, these younger swimmers would compete at County, Regional and National level against each other in individual events. So, at National level there would be a boy's 13 year 100m Freestyle champion, a boy's 13 year 400m Individual Medley champion etc. But who is the champion of champions? The medley swimmer surely because he is good at all strokes; but what if the 100m freestyler swam the fastest ever in the country for a 13 year old – wouldn't he be better?

So – along came BAGCATS. For every race that a BAGCAT swimmer competes in at each County, Regional and National Championships, they will be awarded BAGCAT points depending on their age group, how fast they swam the stroke and distance. How these points are arrived at is a science in itself, based on world records and all sorts of clever stuff and it's probably easier to not to even attempt to understand! However, what it is important to know is that generally the tougher and longer distance events will give more points than the shorter easier ones.

Now every swim has points, are they just added together? No – that would be too easy and would just mean that the swimmer with more swims is likely to win. So, the swimming events are divided into categories each of which has their own individual way of testing the swimmer.

Categories vary slightly depending on the swimmer age and whether at County, Regional or National level but essentially fall into the following groups,

1. Freestyle – All swimmers are expected to be proficient at this stroke and this therefore has its own category – Distances are 200m 400m 800m or 1,500m depending on age.

2. Form Stroke – Either butterfly, backstroke or breaststroke. Every swimmer is expected to be particularly proficient in something other than freestyle. Distances are always 200m.

3. Sprints – All strokes. Distances are 50m for County, 100m for Regional and National. This tests the swimmers sprinting ability.

4. Medley – All swimmers are expected to be able to swim all strokes. Distances are 100m, 200m and 400m for County and 200m and 400m for Regional / National.

5. 100's – An additional sprint category for short course County BAGCATS only.

Points for each swim are assigned to the relevant category but it is always the HIGHEST points only that go towards the total of the five added together. So if a swimmer gets 315 points from a 200 backstroke and then gets 330 points from a 200 breaststroke, then only the 330 points from the breaststroke swim will stand in the Form Stroke category.

In order to compete for top positions in the overall BAGCAT competition, it is therefore essential that the swimmer enters events in all 5 categories.

The importance of doing well in overall BAGCAT scoring cannot be over-emphasised. British Swimming's talent ID programme will always look at BAGCAT rankings rather than individual event winners, this being a clear indication that these competitors are more likely to develop into better swimmers.

So why is this system only used for swimmers up to 14 year old boys and 13 year old girls?

Most importantly it is to ensure that swimmers do not specialise in one stroke at an early age. A swimmer's best stroke at age 9 may not necessarily be their best stroke one or two years later and the BAGCAT system with its requirement to swim Medleys is specifically designed to accommodate this. The Form Stroke category also ensures that variety is maintained by swimmers having to be proficient at more than one stroke.

When swimmers move into their mid to late teens, their bodies become fully developed (girls sooner than boys – hence the difference in BAGCAT upper ages) and they should start to specialise in strokes and distances. Therefore beyond BAGCAT ages, swimmers will compete at County, Regional and National events at individual events.

Table of Events for Winchester City Penguins Swimming Club Championships

1 x 50 metre event

1 x 200 metre event (Backstroke, Breaststroke or Butterfly)

1 x Frontcrawl Distance event (200m, 400m, 800m or 1500m)

1 x Individual Medley Event (100m, 200m or 400m)

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