

AN INTRODUCTION TO SWIMMING GALAS

Some Disabled swimmers enjoy and benefit from the stimulus of competition, and so they should be encouraged to take part in Galas. However, swimmers should not be bullied or coerced into taking part if they do not want to, since as well as simply not wishing to take part, they may also have other medical reason for not being able to take part.

There are a number of different ways in which races could be organised: -

It could be conventional style of race, where everyone starts at the same time and the first past the finishing post is the winner, which is fine for people who are deaf or blind since they are in all other respects perfectly fit. On the other hand there is no way some disabled persons could possibly win, and so probably even the most determined would eventually feel so demoralised that they could give up swimming altogether, and these are the very people we need to encourage. So what are the alternatives?

We could have races for people with a particular type to disability, but in our opinion, this is not really viable for a number of reasons: -

- (a) Fortunately, there are not enough people with one disability to make it practical on a club level, and even on a National level it restricts competition.
- (b) Unfortunately the chances are that if a person has a disability they probably will have more than one and so it is difficult to categorise people.
- (c) Similarly, people may be more or less able, depending on at what stage of the illness they are, and so this too could give an unfair advantage.

The method usually considered fairest to everyone is some form of **'timed handicapped system'**. This may be either, the swimmers take part in a race covering a specified time band, or the method used by the Halliwick Association of Swimming Therapy. Here, the swimmers are timed regularly before the race and the best of these times submitted to the Race Timing Co-ordinator (RTC). The RTC then arranges the race so that the slowest swimmer goes at "GO" and the others then follow at relevant intervals arrived at by deduction their 'entered times' from that of the slowest swimmer. This means that all the swimmers should reach the finish at the same time, but due to the excitement of the race and the adrenaline flowing, the swimmers try their best and real competition occurs.

However to prevent this method of handicapping being abused, a system of repositioning is used. For more details see Appendix L – 'Racing by Timed Handicapping – Halliwick AST Method'.

Incidentally this method can be used by able-bodied swimmers and enables races to take place between our Clubs and able-bodied Swimming Clubs, as well as less competent able-bodied swimmers.

Apart from the fact that the races are timed handicapped, the Halliwick Association of Swimming Therapy Galas are run under similar rules and in a similar manner to the way competitions are usually run for the able-bodied swimmers. Although it may sound complicated, a Gala is made up of a number of people doing a series of relatively simple jobs, the important thing is that they all work as a team.

The information contained in our publication **'Gala Organisation Pack'**, provides a sound footing for organising Swimming Galas. To buy this publication, visit our ['Publications'](#) page. Also ask the help and advice of the National Competitions Committee of the Halliwick AST, and of people affiliated to our organisation who organise Galas in your area.

Go and see how other Clubs run their Galas. Start by organising a small, short Club Gala and gradually lengthen and improve them as you become more confident, but never let them go on too long.

The important thing to remember is that swimmers and officials should take part in Galas because *they want to* and *because they enjoy it*.