

Derbyshire Age Groups and BAGCATS Explained

The Derbyshire Age Group Championships (commonly known as the Derbyshires) are held across three weekends in March: 3rd/4th March at Matlock; 10/11th March at Chesterfield and 17th/18th March at Queens Derby, all being in short course (25m) pools. The third weekend is only for relay events.

There are entry times for this competition that may be achieved at any meet (gala) or club time trial. The age range for this competition is Boys 9-14 and Girls 9-13. The age of the swimmers will be as of 11th March 2012.

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

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 (an ASA initiative, details on the ASA website).

For every race that a BAGCAT swimmer competes in at the Derbyshires, they will be awarded **BAGCAT** points depending on their age group, how fast they swam, the stroke and distance. The exact calculation is very complicated, relating to world record times amongst other things, but generally the longer, harder distance events score more points than shorter ones.

Every swim has points, but they are not just added together as this would mean the swimmers swimming most events is likely to win. Instead, the events are divided into categories, each of which has their own individual way of testing the swimmer.

Categories are as follows:

1. Freestyle – All swimmers are expected to be proficient at this stroke and this therefore has its own category – Distances are 200m, 400m, 800m (girls), 1,500m (boys) 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 – 50m, all strokes. 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

5. 100's – An additional sprint category, girls can swim 100m events from age 11, boys from age 12.

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 categories.

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