

The Swimming Gala...

Today was the day my eldest had been dreading for a while. The Junior Swimming Gala.

Luke loves to swim but, mainly, only for fun.

He has swum for a good few years now, and has weekly lessons, but this wasn't to pressure him into being the next Michael Phelps, it was to give him confidence in the water and for safety reasons so that if he was ever to get into difficulty in the water, he would stand a much better chance of being able to get himself out of it (not that I'm a worrier...). He is competent at swimming, but even he will agree he isn't going to be 'a swimmer'. The intention is there, but the co-ordination and determination isn't. Much like his dad when he dances ☐

Anyhow, this morning arrived and Luke heaved himself out of bed ready for the Junior Swimming Gala, his little face full of apprehension...

This is his first year in Juniors, so the first time he has taken part in the event and, to be honest, I was just as nervous as he was. Not only was I nervous for him to be brave and have a good old go at it, but because I also had his toddler brother in tow who I had to try and entertain for 2 hours...

The weather report said rain about 12pm but seen as this is the UK, I packed waterproofs and an Umbrella as well as a multitude of toys and snacks to keep the minature menace amused.

During the walk to school, I gave Luke a little pep talk and he walked almost the whole way to school biting his nails. I did the standard, "It's the taking part that counts, and someone has to come first and last..." speech, but I'm not sure

it helped very much. He just stared at me and carried on biting his nails.

I used to be the same myself when I had sporting events looming. I would get nervous, to the point of feeling sick, and whip myself into a bit of a frenzy. I love sport, but I had no desire to want to compete against people individually, it's just not in my nature and, sadly for Luke, he has inherited this same trait despite me trying my best to encourage him.

As we near school, the dark clouds descend and it begins to spit with rain. How sodding typical is that?! Junior sports day last week got rained off and now it was looking like there was a chance that the swimming gala would be too – I knew Luke would be secretly rather pleased the rain gods were smiling down on him in a bid to sabotage yet another organised school event. The parents stood outside the school gate (well, the majority of us did, some didn't get the memo and stayed inside the school after they had dropped their kids off at their classrooms, and thus bagged the few available poolside seats. Another one of my traits is doing as I am told...sometimes I wish I could be a little more rebellious!) and then at 9am, the gates were opened.

We got round to the pool and it was now, literally pissing with rain.

They decided to go ahead with the gala but keep the kids indoors in classrooms until it was their time to swim.

Us parents meanwhile, took shelter under a couple of gazebos that had probably been intended for the kids to use as shade in case of warm weather...(cue laughter). Instead, us parents huddled under them as best as we could and I decided to sit on the end of a bench, half in and half out of the Gazebo shelter so I could be near the pushchair – which actually meant I ended up getting more wet than I would have had I been stood

entirely outside it because the rain was tiddling off the top of said gazebo onto my head like a miniature version of Angel Falls.



The toddler began to get rowdy after 5 minutes. Chuffing great. He hates rain covers so I didn't even attempt to put that on the pushchair and he also kicked off when I covered his legs with a waterproof coat. Other parents must have thought I was an absolutely crap mum for leaving him in the pushchair with his legs and feet dangling out, getting soaked...I tried. It's not worth the drama trying to force these things on him so I just give up. It's only a bit of water as

they say.

All around me, parents are shouting, taking photos and cheering on their kids and their kids friends. The competitiveness begins come out in everyone and, despite the rain, people begin to really get into it all. Some parents sit quietly and watch, whilst others dig in their bags for a homemade banner and set of pom poms...ok, maybe not the pom poms but there were a couple of soggy banners. I was too preoccupied chasing the toddler to watch much of it and I now knew, after seeing the timetable of events, that Luke was only in a team 'toggle' race near the end of the gala. Bless his heart. Most other kids had swum in one, or two, individual events, but Luke was only to swim one length with the aid of a toggle...or woggle as I know them. It's the taking part Gemma, remember, it's the taking part. I was a little miffed as to why this was seen as I know he can competently swim a length and he is actually very good on his back, but at least he was having a go and, in my opinion, it was a good thing that he was only taking part in a group event so that the pressure was off him a bit. Less chance of a meltdown that way.

The individual races went first, we have a lot of club swimmers in our school and they flew like graceful torpedo's through the water. Finely tuned swimming strokes, long limbs, competitiveness and budding talent. Everything I could only aspire to be in the pool...nowadays I look a bit like this when I get in the water;



By the time Luke gets to swim, the gala has been going for almost 2 hours. We have been rained on, the toddler has started to get bored and he has also eaten all the unhealthy crap I took for him in case of dire emergency. I manage to weave through the crowd to the pool so I can watch Luke swim, the moment we have waited almost 2 hours for. He stands there in his swim shorts, with his swim hat on which is squishing his little features up so he resembles some sort of Caricature...and he is biting his nails still. He's stood behind the swimming pool screen and I have one of those moments where I just want to scoop him up, despite him being 8, and tell him he's still my champ even if it doesn't go well – I'm sure he wouldn't have thanked me for it if I had though. The kids swim in groups and they take it in turns to swim to their friend who is stood waiting at the end of the pool in order to give them the woggle, basically, it's a relay.

The whistle goes. Luke is last in his group to swim, he has the home leg. His friends stand there cheering each other on, he continues to stay quiet and bite his nails. The third person in his group goes and they are doing well until they reach the halfway point in the pool and the poor little mite clearly has a bit of a panic. The kiddie stops, looks very sad, and staff have to intervene and encourage them along to the end of the pool. The poor thing. I feel their pain and hideous childhood memories of school swimming 25 years ago come flooding back to me...the memories are so bad they make me want a Gin and Tonic, actually, no, make that just a straight Gin.

Luke, who is normally really good and compassionate with others then looks frantic. I worry that he is going to become a bit of a hooligan and start shouting at his friend to hurry up, to get out of the pool, blaming them for loosing, but he doesn't. He is desperate not to come last, the pressure is evident on his face, but instead of becoming angry and cross with his friend, he begins screaming encouragement. He's no longer biting his nails, he was getting involved. And I was so proud of him. That moment was better than his swim for me. To know that he could put his own feelings and worries aside when someone else was in need and clearly having a tough time, showed me what a super little boy he can be at times. Don't get me wrong, he can be an utter bugger at times too, only yesterday he told me that he wished I had stayed at home rather than going to Nanny and Grandad's house with him –
pahahahahaha!!! ☐

After his friend managed to finish their length, Luke jumped in and set off at his leisurely pace, eventually crashing into the wall of the pool at the halfway point ☐

He kept going however and, with some encouragement from his swimming teacher, kicked his little legs as fast as he could go (whilst probably visualising a pork pie at the end of the pool, he is highly motivated by Pork Pies is our Luke...) and he

managed to help bring his team home in 3rd place. Not too shabby given their team had a bit of a delay. Regardless of the 3rd place sticker he got, which he wasn't impressed with may I add, he was my winner. He tried, he had a go, he cared for a friend who needed some help and he didn't give up. What more can you ask for?

I'll be sure to tell him how proud I am of him later. He might even get a kinder egg...or a Pork Pie ☐



This was Luke's take on loungewear the other day...I had asked him to get dressed and this is what I was presented with. He had technically done as he was told...

I'm not sure I can deal with this every year, but deal with it we must. I've got another 2 boys to go through the school yet.

I make that about 2027 by the time I finish the Primary Swimming Gala's. Crikey. I'm going to need a lot of Gin.

Do you like sports day and swimming gala's?

Gems.x

