

Your First Tournament

by Gordon Hall

Emotions are high, and the thrill of competition is energizing everybody. It's hard to tell who's more excited ... parents or the young competitors. What can you expect at your first water ski tournament? Here are some tips to make it a great experience.

Show up early. Juniors are often the first classes to ski, and both you and your skier will have butterflies. Don't cut it close on time.

Study the course and site. Make sure your skier knows where to start, where to drop, where the starting buoys are etc. Speak with a tournament organizer if you need help or have questions.

Stay in the know. Check in with the tournament organizers. Weather and a variety of other things can cause last-minute changes to schedules, running orders, and starting locations... don't get surprised by these.

Cheer for your skier! When your skiers starts, or is set down between passes or jumps, Let them hear you! Enthusiasm is contagious.

Set a good example. Encourage good sportsmanship. No booing... just cheering. No frowns... just smiles.

Know the Rules. Parents are allowed to be the skier's "designated representative," and as such can be the skier's voice on all official matters. One coach can ride in the boat in the tricks event, request changes in speed or boat path, rerides, and a variety of other things as their kids' coach/advocate. So knowledge of the rules is critical.

Be ready to ski. Have all equipment at the starting dock well in advance. Last minute searching for lost gloves could ruin your mental edge.

Have everything you need. Bring all equipment, towels, sunscreen, snacks and drinks, dry clothes, first aid supplies, sunscreen, etc. Yes, it can fill up an SUV...but you don't want to be running to a store half an hour away for something forgotten.

Ski too! Water skiing is a family sport with some 15 different age divisions for each gender, not to mention skill-based divisions as well. There's no reason for mom & dad not to get wet too!

Help out! Regardless of your experience level, there is ALWAYS a way for you to help the sponsoring club. Many "official" positions do not require a judge's rating (USA Waterski Active membership is required). Dock starters, safety swimmers, and scoring assistants are always in need. There's no better way to make new ski buddies.

Hang out at the dock. Don't just ski and leave. Much can be learned from watching fellow competitors and milling around the dock.

Leave Fido at home. Many sites prohibit dogs, and while we love our pets, they tend to add stress in this situation. Fido is best left home for your first tournament adventure.

Ask questions. Much can be learned from other parents and contestants at the site. Most are more than willing to share.

Don't borrow equipment. Bring your own. You could cause someone to be scratched if borrowed equipment is not brought back on time.

SMILE! After all... you're with folks who, like you, share a passion for waterskiing ...What could be better?