

GUIDE TO OFFICIATING SWIMMING

INTRODUCTION

Preface

The chapters of the *Guide to Officiating* represent what is good about the sport of swimming and why many officials make it their lifetime avocation. The text represents the efforts of over 65 people working on this as a volunteer project. The team was the entire National Officials Committee for 1998. This included the steering group and each of the 59 LSC Officials Chairs. These individuals worked in small project sub-teams to pool their many years of varied experience. In is no small measure of the progress in nationwide training that these individuals were able to communicate and come to well-respected approaches to the instruction and description of swim officiating.

Since that time, the various chapters have been updated to reflect the changes in rules and procedures that have occurred in our sport. We welcome any critical comment or improvement in practices. Please submit those by e-mail to the USA Swimming Officials Committee at onthesamepage@optonline.net for consideration by the USA Swimming Officials Committee.

Rules

Any discussion of officiating and a manual to assist with that activity must be based on a sound understanding of the rules of the sport. The basis for the rules of swimming are found in the rules used by the Federation Internationale de Natation Amateur (FINA). FINA governs the international competitions. In most instances the rules specified by USA Swimming in the Rules and Regulations conform directly to the FINA rules. In fact, our own rule book requires USA Swimming to conform to FINA rules when they change.

The USA Swimming rules form the basis upon which all decisions are made. One of the most frequently asked questions is, "Why aren't the rules written so clearly that we don't need interpretations?" The answer is that when it comes to rule interpretation, there are sometimes situations where there are no right or wrong answers. Long time Rules Chair, William A Lippman, Jr. stated in October, 1981, "It is my philosophy that we cannot, in advance, provide a "How to Do It" for every possible happening. Nor can we always strongly see alike on everything that can take place. If we cannot, as the foremost authority on USA Swimming rules, strongly agree on an interpretation, then we should leave such adjudication for referees and juries who are at the scene."

In April 1982, Lippman further stated, "*Let's not try to cover every possible situation in the swimming rules. Let's not write rules to cover these strange and rare possibilities. Leave something for the referee to decide. Let the humans present consider the facts, and come to their own decision on how to handle it. It is impossible to make rules absolute in every instance. There must be room for human judgment to adapt to the intent of the rule to the incident and to the physical factors and make the final decision. That is my philosophy. It is based too on a belief that most adults involved in our sport are fundamentally honest and are willing to exercise their judgment for the best interests of all parties involved.*"

The competent swimming official is a judge of the competition not a judge of the rules.

The swimming rules must be followed. The official who has standards that differ from those set down in the rulebook will be open to negotiation on every decision made. Following the rules puts a stake in the ground that tells everyone concerned with the competition that the decisions will be made in a fair and equitable manner against a known standard. As an official, an individual must operate from a strong base. That base is made up of two factors – one is the authority of the rulebook and the other is the basic philosophy that the officials conduct the competition in accordance with the rules. Each time a rule and



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the purpose of that rule are explained, the rule becomes easier to accept. Rather than hiding behind the statement "It's the rule", an official should explain why there was a violation so the official does not appear to be arbitrary. The official's job is to uphold the rules by applying them intelligently and communicating their interpretation effectively.

This officiating manual was constructed by the LSC official's chairs of USA Swimming to provide a tool for learning, consistency, training and application of judgment. It should be used in conjunction with the rulebook and not as a standalone document. There are additional documents published by the USA Swimming Officials Committee that complement this manual and provide guidance regarding some of the procedures and protocols used at meets. These can be found on the USA Swimming web site at www.usa-swimming.org.

