

REPORT TO VSI ON THE
2006 USA SWIMMING OFFICIALS WORKSHOP

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SUBMITTED BY
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DAY I

I. Coaches Presentation:

In the swimming venue you tend to find many coaches who are well informed but you will find most officials well informed when it comes to the rules. Coaches at times are not all that informed about the rules. Recommendation was that coaches should take a S&T clinic and to also take the officials test to become better informed coaches,

Coach's expectations of an official are to officiate what a child is doing not how they are doing it. Coaches do not want officials coaching the athlete.

Officials when on deck should be prepared and able to deal with the following: confrontation, disagreement, explanation, clarification and mediation-negotiation. Having these skills is a must for any official.

Common goals recited for officials and coaches:

- Know the rule book.
- Know what good and great swimming looks like.
- Rules make for even handiness, not for faster swimming.
- Know and use proper etiquette.
- Set an example for athletes – don't argue, this sets a bad example and is seen by many others on deck.
- ½ of a conversation is listening. Give the coach a chance to talk.

Be able to recognize different types of body language. This is very important when dealing with situations on deck. What is the coach projecting, what is the official showing to the coach and others.

ACTIONS

Brisk, erect walk
Standing hands on hips
Sitting (legs crossed foot kicking)
Setting (legs apart)
Walking hands in pockets
Hand to cheek
Touching or rubbing nose
Rubbing eye
Hands clasped (behind back)
Head in hands (eyes down)
Rubbing hands
Sitting with hands behind head
Open palm
Pinching bridge of nose
Messing with hair

INTERPRETATIONS

Confidence
readiness, aggression
Boredom
Open, relaxed
Dejection
Evaluation, thinking
Rejection, doubt, lying
Doubt, disbelief
Frustration, apprehension
Boredom
Anticipation
Confidence, superiority
Sincerity, openness
Negative evaluation
Insecurity, indecisiveness

ACTIONS (CONT)

Tilted head
Stroking Chin

INTERPRETATIONS (CONT)

Interest
Trying to make a decision

Think about what you are saying to others through your body language and what they are saying to you.

Dos and Don'ts of officiating:

DO's

Make eye contact
Listen and think
Evaluate situation
Always be sure
Tell swimmers what they did wrong
Learn how to speak with a smile

DON'TS

Look around disinterested
Have pre-conceived notions
Judge the person
Be afraid to change your mind
Tell them how to do it correctly
Scowl and have a bully attitude

Remember: having a sense of humor is a gift – knowing how and when to use it is an art.

Coaches see a progression in levels of meets and the officiating that occurs at each level:

- Beginning Level – B/C meets, inter-squad meets. Important not to let the major flaws pass.
- Middle Level – A/BB meets, district/regional champs. What are the athletes not getting by this time? What are they still lacking at this level? Expectation is if you observe it you write it.
- End – Championships, qualification meets. This is where if action is not taken earlier the hammer comes down on the athlete who is not prepared. This is usually because of others not doing their jobs.

Coaches, officials and parents love the swimmers. We want them to learn and grow. We want swimming to be a part of their lives forever. We want them to learn: right from wrong, cause and effect, and that failure is simply one of the stepping stones to success. We are all on this “ride” together and we all want what is best for the athletes and the sport. Coaches, officials and parents all teach in their own way and have their special impact on a child's life. ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT BECAUSE THEY WILL!

II. Athlete's Presentation:

Top Ten List for Athletes:

10. Passion – Love the sport; let the athletes see that in you.
9. Authority- Essential for the competition. Need to show this to the athlete. They in turn will see the level of confidence in the official.
8. Even temper – Highs and lows of the athletes are different than what you want to see from the official. Officials should maintain a level disposition during the meet with no highs and lows.
7. Consistency – Officials must be fair across the board. Be dedicated to making that call when warranted.
6. Experience – Athletes want the official who DQ's them to know what they are talking about.
5. Civility – Be respectful of the what, not the how.
4. Verbalization – Make sure you are clear and concise about what the athletes did wrong.
3. Benefit of the doubt vs. letter of the law – Make sure rule is broken. Need to be absolutely correct in making a call. Call what you see, see what you call.
2. Integrity – Officials are role models to a large number of athletes – be one.
1. Safety – The athlete upon entering a venue assume that they are entering a safe environment. This falls on the shoulders of the officials running the meet.

During the discussion regarding safety, the subject of air quality was brought up. The following is parts of that discussion:

Presently there are no rules governing air quality in a swimming venue. However this is being recognized by USA Swimming as a major issue that needs to be dealt with. USA Swimming and the CDC are now working together reviewing these water/air quality issues. A report may be out in a couple of years addressing this issue. Regarding air quality one of the major issues is that of air handlers. The majority of air handlers used in a pool environment do not have a max setting which is needed in a pool house. The odor that we smell is that of ammonia which is a by product of chlorine. In regards to safety for the athlete it is important to realize that if officials, while standing on the deck are having difficulty breathing think about the problems the athletes are having at water level. Questions we may be facing in the future are: how bad is the air/water, quality is it having a negative effect on the athletes and at what point do we as officials remove the athletes from the water.

III. Providing a Safe Environment for the Athletes

This presentation focused on the YMCA's child abuse prevention checklist used by local YMCAs. The YMCAs approach is to make sure staff and volunteers in supervisory positions are as rigorous as possible in screening out potential

offenders. The YMCA also trains all staff and volunteers on child abuse prevention. The YMCA also has a rigorous pre-employment screening process that includes checking applicant resumes, applications, references and criminal background histories. The YMCA also keeps complete written records on file of the entire screening process. Education of staff and volunteers on the characteristics of child abusers and the patterns they follow are also given. Reporting of suspicious behavior is everybody's responsibility. The YMCA also communicates with and educates parents about their child abuse prevention policies. Facilities are monitored at all times to provide a safe environment for the youth. If something should occur staff are trained in how to handle the situation and has provided the forms and documents for reporting child abuse incidents. Finally, the YMCA has developed a crisis communication plan that identifies a crisis team and spokesperson that provides message points, fact sheets and media relations. Abuse prevention is an area that the YMCA has identified and has taken very seriously.

It is important to be pro-active regarding this matter. Need to recognize people who are at the pool for the wrong reason. If you see something out of the ordinary, investigate. Abuse tends to happen away from everyone else. It is important that locker rooms are patrolled. Camera phones are now becoming a major issue and are becoming the latest instruments of abuse. Remember a picture taken by a camera phone can be place on the Web almost immediately. Finally, facilities need to establish guidelines as to how to handle these types of incidents.

IV. Rules Update and the Philosophy of Officiating

Currently there is a concerted effort to change the mindset not to read the rules with the focus being looking for ways to disqualify athletes. The benefit of the doubt, within the parameters of the rules, always goes to the swimmer. Officials need to keep in mind the intent of the rules which is to provide fair competition among the athletes, where no one swimmer is favored over another. Officials are not inspectors but an observer. The mark of a good official is not the number of calls they make. Officials need to have a calm demeanor and to be confident in covering their jurisdictions. The important thing to remember is that we cannot judge athletes equality but that we can judge them fairly.

V. National Officials Certification Program

This program was developed in order to meet the goals of breaking down the goals of the good old boy system and to begin training other interested officials to perform at the National and National Championship level through increased knowledge, education, participation and especially mentoring. It also requires individuals who only worked National Championship meets to now have to work lower level meets in order to "spread the knowledge". These individuals in order to maintain their certification are now required to mentor less experienced

officials. These N3 (old National Championship level) officials if approved by the officials committee may act as National Evaluators at qualifying meets in order to provide observation and recommendation of advancement of officials to the N2 and N3 levels. The new levels are as follows:

N1 – LSC Level

N2 – Old National Level

N3 – Old National Championship Level

DAY II

VI. 10 Points of Self-Evaluation

1. Did I blow any calls? Reflect on this after each session and meet. Check the rule book.
2. Were there any times when it was fortunate that I didn't have to make a call? Know what you are watching. Lapses in concentration, improper positioning and failure to hustle go unnoticed by others (coaches excepted). Do not ignore lapses. Sooner or later such shortcomings will catch up to you.
3. Did I do everything to ensure a just outcome? Do not become a part of the competition. By doing so you may react or respond in a manner that may influence the outcome of an event. Do not let emotions control you and end up prejudicing yourself. Give swimmers the benefit of the doubt. Don't look for ways to DQ athletes.
4. Were my calls/decisions consistent? Calls must be made fair and consistent. Deviating from this philosophy will drive coaches and spectators crazy.
5. Did I fail to maintain proper control at anytime? Do not lose control of the deck. The official's job is to control the behavior of the athletes, coaches and spectators so the meet can proceed in an orderly fashion. Arguments and interference can disrupt the proper flow of the meet. Use surprises as a learning experience.
6. When did I feel most vulnerable to outside influences? Try not to get behind the "eight ball". Identify when you are most susceptible to outside influences. Watch the body language. Listen first before opening your mouth.
7. Were there any situations where I avoided or usurped responsibility for a ruling at the expense of another official? Always keep in mind that you acting in the best interest of the meet. Again listen to all parties prior to making a decision.
8. Was there anything about my signals, gestures or style that enabled an unexpected or unwanted response? Be aware of the signals you are presenting, do not send the wrong message. Blank face when making calls. Don't look happy, smiling etc. This may be interpreted as enjoying the DQing of athletes.

9. Did I uphold, defend or rationalize any improper ruling? Accept responsibility, do not penalize participants. Inflexibility is a vice. Always get the information you need to change a decision. Don't be afraid to correct a mistake. Need to be fair to all participants.
10. Was there a particular aspect of my performance that I could work on at the next meet? Your best/perfect meet has yet to be run. One is only as good as their last meet. Have the right frame of mind when you enter a meet because this could be your worst. There are always areas that one can improve in.

VII. The Six no Seven P's of Meet Referee

1. Philosophy: Leadership is the key word for the meet referee. The meet referee designs the game plan; he/she is the leader. The deck referee carries out the game plan. If possible the meet referee should select their leadership team. The selection of their chief judges is critical. A good chief judge makes for an informed, organized and a happy deck. Once this skilled team is selected, fill in the rest of the slots with people not as skilled as the leadership deck. These are the officials we want to mentor. These are the up and coming officials who will eventually take our spots on the deck. The meet referee needs to convey to these individuals that failing is OK. This is the reason for the mentors to be there to pick them up and to help them succeed. Finally, the meet referee needs to look for ways to install some fun in a meet i.e. parades, clothing, drum rolls etc. for the athletes and the officials.
2. Priority: #1 priority is the athletes, #2 priority is the athlete and the #3 priority is the athlete, then the coaches. The coaches are the support group for priority #'s 1, 2 & 3. Officials are able to take care of themselves.
3. Preparation: The earlier the meet referee gets involved the better run a meet will be. Get with the meet director early on to review the meet. This is the mark of a successful meet. If you are the meet referee at an unfamiliar venue take the time to discuss issues with someone who has been a meet referee at that facility.
 - Coaches Meeting: Discuss start time for each session. Talk about any unusual procedures i.e. chase starts, or two swimmers per lane for distance. End to start 50's and swim-off procedures. Make sure all swim-offs are completed by the end of the prelims session. It is a bad idea to wait until finals. Make sure the consequences for the check-in, scratch procedures, meet juries and water temperature (always 80 degrees, makes them think you are looking at all the details) are explained.
 - Officials Meeting: Outline your expectations for them. Deck referee, starter and chief judge need to be given the plan that you want them to follow. Let the officials know the job you want them to perform then get out of their way. BE A LEADER NOT A DICTATOR.

4. Practical: Don't come up with any unusual solutions. You are not alone you have a lot of resources on deck to call on. Know your leaders on deck. If you don't know them then you are lacking and not exhibiting good leadership. Be open and honest with the coaches. People like to be dealt with up front.
5. Pro-Active: Be aware of problems that will affect a meet. Have in place contingency plans i.e. when to call the police, fire or EMTs. Think down the road. What ifs.
6. Pliant/flexibility: The best plan in the world will change. Need to be able to adjust on the fly. If you make a decision always be ready to make adjustments if it does not work.
7. Patience: From the time you start planning to the completion of the meet, patience is a necessary virtue.

VIII. Traps and Pitfalls of a Referee

1. Don't be a slave to a time line. When you try to make the meet go faster chances are smaller problems will occur that will eat up any time gained. Don't get too far ahead of the timeline. You don't want athletes in the warm-up/warm-down pool when you call their event.
2. Respect your stroke and turn officials. They are the most important official on the deck. The better you train, mentor and brief them the better the job they will do on deck. They in turn can make a referee look good. Athletes care little about the referee and the starter. They know that it is the stroke and turn officials who write the majority of the DQs.
3. Make sure you are prepared to live up to the precedents that you set. Follow the game plan set out by the meet referee.
4. You are a leader not a dictator. Your leadership role is on display. Show a high degree of professionalism. How you present to others will transfer to the officials on deck. Leave the god complex at home. Be willing to rely on others for their help. Need to get all officials to feel a part of the team. Be sure your apprentices are introduced to the other officials; have them feel part of the team.
5. Involve all individuals who are affected by your decision.
6. Respect your officials. If you overrule a call make sure you explain your reasoning to the official who had made the call. Make sure they don't lose confidence in themselves.
7. Not saying Thank You enough to all the individuals working the meet, at all levels. Move around the deck if able and talk to coaches. Let people know you are glad they are there.