

# **Trip Report**

2008 USA-S Referee Training Workshop  
Minneapolis, MN – October 10-12

Submitted by:

Avis Aheron & Tom Colasurdo

## Friday Evening Session

The weekend began with a warm welcome, and some administrative chores; then dinner was served.

After dinner the session began with the introduction of presenters and attendees. Due to the unavailability of an overhead projector, Joel Black's presentation on working with coaches was rescheduled.

Jim Sheehan mediated a very lively session on issues that the attendees provided prior the Training Workshop. Each topic was thoroughly discussed, and many of the attendees and presenters had an opportunity to let the rest of us know how their LSC handled each issue.

The topic of two swimmers competing in one lane was discussed. No new insights or concerns were expressed at the workshop. The USA-S presenters' consensus was that "common sense" should be applied when the Rules and Regulations do not specifically prohibit or specifically require an action. This was a continuing theme during the workshop.

We adjourned until the morning, leaving us time to get acquainted with our roommates and other attendees that gravitated to the lounge area.

## Saturday Sessions

After breakfast we reconvened to begin the presentations on the workshop's major emphasis – working with coaches and athletes, Meet Referee, Deck Referee, Chief Judge, Starter, and Administrative Referee.

Our athlete presenter could not be with us, but relayed through his coach that “swimmers want to know exactly what they did wrong to be disqualified”. The perspective was for fixing and learning, not arguing.

Paul Lundsten, Head Coach STAR Swim Team in St. Paul, Minnesota, brought a dynamic speaking style to the topic of working with coaches. Communication between officials and coaches is paramount to a successful swim meet. Paul stressed that some coaches treat officials badly, and officials should not let them. Consistent start for all athletes was a topic of concern, specifically a quick release vs. saving the one. Officials cheering while on deck is a negative. It was recommended that officials who want to cheer should leave the deck, remove all credentials and join the spectators in the bleachers. One suggestion to foster understanding between officials and coaches was to require coaches to attend an official's pre-session brief every two or three years as part of their coaching certification requirements. Paul suggested that the meet referee and other officials be encouraged to talk to coaches on deck as a means of fostering better communication between officials and coaches. Paul also thought bringing officials into the practice environment would be beneficial. Paul left us with the thought that “attitudes are contagious”.

Prior to our break, Bruce Stratton talked about the process of changing the current rules and regulations. He emphasized that the USA-S web site is available as a tool for officials to utilize. He also conveyed that a new rule will be going into effect concerning 12 & under age group competition with respect to swim suit limitations. For these swimmers, swim suits cannot be below the knee or over the neck. Rational was the cost of swim suits, and the perceived necessity, is forcing younger swimmers out of the sport. Meet invitations may be required to have a statement concerning pool certification. Meet invitations for timed final events should include the scratch procedures (not just championship meets). Bruce provided information concerning dual sanctioned, USA-S and USMS, swim meets. This information is provided as attachment 'A'. A briefing document for meet marshals is ready to be posted to the USA-S web site.

After our break, Dan McAllen spoke on being a Meet Referee. Leadership, preparation, and prioritizing are key attributes of a successful Meet Referee. Applying patience, flexibility, honesty, practicality, thoughtfulness, courtesy, and a proactive and positive attitude will lead to the goal of creating an atmosphere that each swimmer can do their best. His list of priorities were: athletes - first,

last and foremost; coaches - second as they are the athlete's primary support group; third - the rest of the officiating crew.

Jim Sheehan spoke next on being a Deck Referee. Working as a team, both wet deck to dry deck and referee and starter, to provide fair and equitable competition. Stressed "problem avoidance" as a key to keeping everything running smoothly.

After our next break, and prior to lunch, Jamy Pfister spoke on being a Chief Judge. Jamy provided a history lesson on how the position was established and has evolved. Communication with the referees, and stoke and turn judges is important. Being flexible is a major attribute.

Coming back from Lunch, Jeannine Dennis spoke on the position of starter. Striving to provide each swimmer the best start they have ever had was the main goal. If you are not having a good day, be courageous enough to step aside. When bad things happen, and they will; learn to forgive yourself. A brief story followed about how Matt Biondi winked at Jeannine while looking back between his legs on the starting block after his swim suit ripped upon taking his mark.

Joel Black presented a video monologue about "Co – Aches". A little Carolina homespun entertainment, dotted with insightful truths on the subject of the interactions between swim officials and coaches. Reviewers gave it two thumbs up, a must see !!!

The final topic of the day dealt with situations. This was another lively discussion period, punctuated with some clear differences in the application of common sense.

## Sunday Sessions

After breakfast we reconvened for our final main topic – administrative referee.

Joel Black covered meet invitation, organization, forms, and processes. He spoke about the duties and protocols of the Administrative Referee on the national deck. He emphasized the need for organization and preparation. Using self-deprecating humor by describing himself as afflicted with attention deficit, he attempted to dispel the impression that the Administrative Referee position is intimidating and is not as bad as some make it out to be. Emphasis was working with the clerk of course, timing system operator, timing judge and computer operator ... not performing their functions.

Pat Lunsford gave a brief overview of the Our Kids Initiative, organized in 2000 with a meeting of representatives from the various swimming governing bodies - FINA, USA-S, YMCA, NCAA and NFHS. While differences in the technical rules and interpretations still exist, the formation of this group highlights the common goal of each governing body that “we are in it for the kids” with the hope of bringing the organizations closer together. Pat stressed helping our swimmers by getting different organizations together on rules.

## Conclusion

The format of the USA-S Referee Training Workshop is very similar to the VSI Referee Clinic. VSI does a very good job training, equipping, and standardizing practices of referees.

Using common sense was stressed over and over again. However, our discussions demonstrated that common sense is not common between everyone.

When compared to other LSC's, VSI seems to have a more rigorous training process for all certifications. VSI was the only LSC represented that has a certification process in place for Chief Judge. Other LSC's require mandatory on-line testing for re-certification. Some LSC's do not require referees to be starters, not to mention timing judges. A little surprised that referees in other LSC's, especially those that act as Meet Referee, do not understand how to set the official time or understand their responsibility with regards to official times as specified in the rules and regulations. Some LSC's do not certify dry deck positions. The availability, or lack thereof, of certified officials in a number of LSC's directly impacts on their ability to stage well-run meets. A number of the attendees stated that they have no idea how many officials will be at any given meet until the initial briefing. Sending out advance notices for officials to sign up, formulating an official's matrix prior to the meet or requiring applications to officiate at championship level meets were foreign concepts to some of the attendees in the small discussion groups. Many of our situation discussions lacked an element of what rules or regulations applied, and how to interpret the rules and regulations. Understanding of the rules and regulations was a big weakness of some attendees.

Many invitations to officiate in other LSC's were extended.

Enjoyed meeting other officials, and putting faces with names. There is no substitute for face-to-face meetings to foster understanding.