

2013 USA Swimming Official's Workshop

October 18-20

Phoenix, AZ

Attended by John Stanley

The workshop began with a Friday evening cocktail followed by a buffet dinner. National staff were introduced and it was shared that officials from greater than 30 LSCs were represented at the workshop. Principle themes selected for the workshop weekend were Rules Clarifications, Characteristics of a successful Meet Referee/Deck Referee, Defining the Admin. Official, and tips from successful Starters.

CeCe Hammond, a college student and US Swimming Athlete Representative opened the Saturday morning discussion by sharing an athlete's perspective of the role of officials. In her case, officials simply enforce the rules of the sport and do not present a threat or façade of intimidation. Among other suggestions, CeCe suggested that "clinics", sanctioned by coaches, be offered so that officials could talk to the athletes and explain the technical rules. In this manner swimmers, who are often unclear on the stroke rules, could gain a better understanding of potential infractions and how officials identify them.

- 1) Rules Clarifications etc.: Clark Hammond & Dan McAllen led a discussion of the recent rules clarifications distributed in August/September, among other items.
 - a. Backstroke – there is no change to the rules, only that redundant word "Finish" is eliminated. As officials, we continue to watch for re-submersion after the swimmer surfaces or after the 15m mark. "Prior to the finish" was redundant and evidently confusing to both officials and coaches.
 - b. Breaststroke/Butterfly – separation of the hands in a two hand touch is common sense. Fingers and/or hands cannot be touching overlapping (stacked). If it isn't clear then don't call it!
 - c. Watches are not pace devices! Trying to read a watch while swimming is a contortionist's nightmare! Same applies for pace clocks and the scoreboards.
 - d. Kinesio tape is compression tape, and thus is not permitted. The value, other than psychological benefits, is questionable, as well.
 - e. The DQ slip is not a document from the Bible. It is to communicate to the coach/swimmer an infraction and to assist the Admin Referee in tracking calls. There is no requirement that the swimmer vs. the coach be informed. Some LSCs simply accumulate the DQ slips at the drydeck tables for pickup by the coaches. Scratched out wording or information does not invalidate the infraction. The DQ is upheld (or not) by the Referee(s).

2) Successful Referee characteristics: Both Dan McAllen and Jim Sheehan shared their thoughts on what constitutes successful refereeing. A Good Referee ...

- a. demonstrates sound judgment and leadership qualities.
- b. is a team player and seeks opinions from other experienced officials on deck.
- c. avoids the “God” complex
- d. delegates and uses talents of the officiating/volunteer team
- e. doesn’t surprise the coaches or swimmers
- f. gets to know and utilize coach “leaders” on deck
- g. reads and understands the meet invitation information
- h. is patient with coaches and allows them to speak
- i. is careful with establishing precedence. A decision made early in the meet could become the baseline for all subsequent decisions during the progression of the meet
- j. knows his/her announcer. Meet with an announcer prior to the start of a session and agree on protocols.
- k. Is flexible with the swimmers, when possible.
- l. Knows his/her Starter and discusses protocols for a given session

Dan and Jim shared other tidbits:

- Do not penalize alternates in finals for no show UNLESS they were specifically notified that they were to advance to finals due to scratches.
- A Deck Referee can use a clipboard or paper in hand to keep up with calls, other information. This facilitates keeping watch on the pool with less distraction ... seeking out note pad.
- Closing a heat is when the Referee says that it is closed! An outstretched hands cedes control to the Starter but can be taken back.
- Deck Referees typically should NOT make stroke calls as this creates unbalance on the deck. Calls typically limited to “whoops” calls that were seen throughout the venue ... swimmer exits the pool before finishing, wrong stroke order in IM, etc.

3) Administrative Official Defined: Various presenters elaborated on the new role of Administrative Official. The Referees broke out into smaller groups and discussed more. Basically the national organization was becoming increasingly worried about the “correctness” and sanctity of the swimmers’ times entered in the SWIMS database. Some LSCs have no established systems or requirements for drydeck operators. Essentially, the AO is a trained official serving as the Timing Judge and must have a working knowledge of both the role of the TSO and the CO. Virginia Swimming has been largely unaffected by this change as TJs already in place. Moreover, drydeck positions require certification in VA. An AO must be designated for EVERY meet. Enforcement will fall to the LSC but entries in OTS will confirm compliance. A Deck Referee or other wet deck official cannot serve simultaneously as an AO while on deck! In larger meets, this role will be fulfilled by the Admin. Referee.

4) Tips for Good Starting:

- a. Take more time before TYM and less after TYM for more consistent starts. The swimmers will let you know through body language when they are ready.
- b. Practice a calm and consistent voice. If swimmers sense that you are calm, they in turn will relax for a better start.
- c. Talk to your Deck Ref. before the session to understand his/her preferences. No two Referees are the same! Communicate yours, as well!
- d. Be your Referees eyes and ears. You are a team – anticipate problems behind the block and relay to your Referee (no shows, broken goggles, swimmers in wrong lanes, Timer issues, etc.)
- e. Temper your expectations. Sometimes 8 bodies facing the right direction and going down at TYM is the best that you are going to get. Young age groupers are less experienced and move around constantly. Your objective is a fair start and equal footing for the field.
- f. Be familiar with the equipment – Daktronics, Colorado, or Omega. Check equipment before the session and ensure functionality.
- g. Understand the False Start. Benefit of the doubt to the swimmers whenever possible, even at the start.
- h. Relax and let the Referee set the pace – your primary job is a fair start for each and every heat and every swimmer.

The workshop concluded Sunday morning with a Q&A session on a variety of topics and exchanges of contacts between attendees.