

A Philosophy for Officiating Swimming

What do we mean by "A Philosophy of Officiating?"

Webster's New Collegiate dictionary defines philosophy:

Phi-los-o-phy n, p] -phies

(ME philosophic, L philosophia, GK philosophos)

1. a: the most general beliefs, concepts, and attitudes of an individual or group (the hippy philosophy)
2. a: a system of philosophical concepts (Kantian-)

b: a theory underlying or regarding a sphere of activity or thought (the - of cooking)
(- of science)

What is it then?

I assert that the philosophy of officiating is:

1. a set of beliefs
2. a state of mind
3. a general understanding

(accepted by its practitioners) of the principles or guidelines by which one is to officiate a swim meet. **It** is the most general beliefs, concepts and attitudes accepted by an individual official or by a group regarding their sphere of activities and the manner in which they wish to act in officiating.

The philosophy of swim officiating is NOT trying to determine how many age groupers can we get into a warm-up pool before prelims. But rather, I suggest it is a state of mind, a set of guidelines, by which to achieve a goal. For swim officials that goal can only be to conduct every swimming competition according to the written rules, so that all the competitors are equally protected and have a fair chance of winning.

The philosophy every swim official must carry onto the pool deck is that their role **SHALL be to provide a safe, fair competition to all**, rather than to catch violators of the rules. Officiating should be FLJN for officials, swimmers and coaches. **If** it isn't fun for an official, then the meet shall suffer along with the swimmers, coaches and officials. The proper philosophy for swim officiating has to be to conduct a competition so that all the competitors are equally protected and have a fair chance of winning.

What is the best way to achieve that "philosophy?"

For me, the philosophy for swim officiating that I want to stress is one of **professionalism**: i.e., to be the best professionals in amateur officiating in the world. Just as United States Swimming has the best amateur athletes in the world, I want USS to RECRUIT, TRAIN, and PROMOTE only the best amateur officials, making them **professionals**.

What makes an official a PRO is not that they are paid by the NFL. What makes them a PRO is their approach to this "Philosophy of Professionalism" - doing the best job possible. We must begin thinking and acting like professionals. Think about the officials you see on TV, the line judge in tennis who's always at attention, or the NCAA backjudge who's on the spot in all pictures. If we think of ourselves as professionals, we'll act more like professionals. I would like the world of swimming to recognize USS's volunteer/amateur corps of officials as **true professionals** in every sense of what that word means.

Let's examine this philosophy of professionalism. Is this idea really a valid goal for amateur swim officials in United States Swimming? I suspect it is even fair to ask if amateur swim officiating has the where-with-all to become a profession with true professionals.

Defining USS officialdom as a profession with professionals:

To be a profession or a professional one must have:

1. A mastery of a substantive body of knowledge.

USS officials must know the rules and regulations.

2. Programs for professional preparation/certification.

USS officials must be trained and certified by an LSC or the National Officials Committee.

3. A Code of Ethics and/or Standards of Conduct.

While USS officials have no written Code of Ethics we have condoned standards of conduct implicit in *our rules and Regulations* which state USS officials are "to provide fair and equitable conditions of competition and promote uniformity in the sport so that no swimmer shall obtain unfair advantage over another."

4. A vital purpose of all professions is public service.

USS officialdom is an all-volunteer corps, which demonstrates the highest professional commitment.

5. A profession promotes information and idea exchange.

A hallmark USS officials have long lived by.

If USS officialdom has the hallmarks of a professional organization, then how do we make its practitioners PROS?

The United States Swimming National Officials Committee sets **high standards** for USS officials and it expects all its certified officials to live by these standards. The standards that a certified USS official must live by are to perform in as professional a manner as one can:

- 1 .by acting within the governing rules of our sport;
2. by acting in a spirit of good sportsmanship;
3. by insuring that the conditions of a competition are fair and equitable for all participants;
4. and by having respect for all those who work with USS to make swimming a great experience for young people.

Whatever the reason one volunteers to be a United States Swimming Official they have chosen to be a representative of a highly professional organization and therefore they must exhibit professional conduct at all times. In addition to the standards above, which are by their nature very general, there are a number of specific ideas that we can discuss at this clinic that may help make us more professional when working in a swim meet.

Let's examine some of these ideas together.

We must analyze our personal reasons and motivations for wanting to be a USS official - it will set the tone for how we act as an official.

First let's ask - Why does one choose to officiate?

Positive Reinforcement: Many get a boost from offering their service to volunteer organizations. It is a rewarding feeling to the human spirit and our psyche to stand and serve.

Parental Commitment: To help your own child. Many officials are swim parents and want to participate in the life experiences of their son / daughter's growth, so they volunteer to be a USS official. Besides, meets are often BORING.

Hours are great: 5:30 a.m. practice. Meets to 9:00 p.m. Pay is exceptional: sliced carrots, chips and dip, cold hot dogs eaten on deck and all that Gatorade.

Enjoyment: Officiating is something I (any person) do well and therefore it is something I enjoy doing.

Swim Groupies: Some will do it to be in the in-crowd, to see and know an American national hero (a Jager, Biondi, Sanders or an Evans). There are a lot of swim groupies out there.

Professionalism: A United States Swimming Official is a member of a professional organization that promotes good sportsmanship via the governing rules of our sport to insure a fair and equal competition for all the participants.

Now that we know some of the Why's and How To's:

I hope that together we can begin a discourse on a number of themes and come to some consensus of opinion on HOW one can professionally officiate a swim meet. I believe there are certain principles (philosophies) that contribute fairness and equity to all the swimmers competing and to all officials running a swim meet. It is these principles (philosophies) which I would like us to discuss together.

My own personal goal in swim officiating is to be recognized by all the competitors and coaches in the sport of swimming, as a "true professional;" to be part of the team, the team of people swimmers, coaches. volunteers and officials that makes every swim event a successful sporting competition. This may be achieved by examining the following Guidelines for Professional Swim Officiating: