

THE REFEREE'S ATTITUDE

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Good morning! Several years ago, we did a survey in Pacific Swimming on perceived problems in officiating in our LSC. Surprisingly, one of the items most frequently mentioned was "attitude". So, although we have improved greatly since that survey was taken, Joe and I thought it wouldn't hurt to review what I'd like to call "The Referee's Attitude".

What is "attitude"? You might be surprised if you looked it up in your computer's Thesaurus to find how many of these synonyms actually apply to the Referee and officiating in general. For instance, attitude is:

Disposition and temperament: *are you calm? or do you fly off the handle easily?*

Perspective: *Do you look at things fairly? Do you keep all swimmers in mind - not just the one with a problem?*

Perceptiveness: *which includes awareness, alertness and judgment incorporating both wisdom and common sense.*

Manner and demeanor: *Do you look and act like a professional?*

Spirit and approach: *Is your intent to always put the swimmers first, or does your ego sometimes get in the way?*

You can see that attitude can play a part in every phase of officiating. The more consistent we can become in our attitude, the more consistent our application of the rules - and our administration of swim meets - will be.

Which brings us to the Referee -- the person whose attitude has the most to do with how a swim meet runs. The Referee makes sure the rules are applied equitably and fairly, he sets the standard for officiating, and greatly influences the atmosphere of the meet.

Think about it -- a nervous, unprepared, excitable referee -- particularly one who is running around trying to do everything himself can make the coaches and swimmers feel that the meet is not under control and that things may go wrong at any time!

On the other hand, a calm, confident and competent referee also imparts that feeling to everyone else -- the whole meet reflects a secure, relaxed atmosphere -- one in which a swimmer can compete to his full potential without worrying about what's going on around him. This is even more important at smaller local meets or dual meets where there are fewer and less experienced officials who are looking to the referee for leadership.

To put it simply -- and I know many of you have heard me say this before -- a referee can either be a chicken or a duck. The unsure nervous referee who tries to do everything himself usually ends up looking like a chicken without a head -- and gets everyone else nervous and on edge in the process.

The "duck type" on the other hand looks calm and confident on top - even though he may be paddling like mad underneath! Ducks are confident around water - chickens aren't! So, how do you make sure you have a "duck-type" attitude? Let's break it down into the stages of a meet -- Pre-meet preparation, Administering the Meet, Handling Problems and Protests and, finally, After the Meet.

PRE-MEET PREPARATION:

First of all, to appear confident - you have to know what you're doing!

Do you know the USA Swimming rules? Not just the stroke rules, but all of Parts 1 and 2 of the rulebook? Do you have to memorize them? Of course not, but be aware of where in the book you can find the applicable rule -- I often prepare my own brief index for hard to find portions, i.e. where is the altitude adjustment rule? (207.9.7) where is the 4-hour rule? (205.3.1F) How about initial splits on a relay? If the relay team is disqualified after the initial swimmer's split is recorded, does the split still count? (102.10.14)

Next, make sure you know your LSC rules, i.e. in Senior meets, do you swim the consols or finals first? (5B C2) what are Pacific Swimming's scratch rules? (3B)

Have you read the meet information thoroughly and made a note of pertinent parts, i.e. will deck entries be taken for relays? What is the deadline? Are awards being given? Is there scoring? Are there any special rules for distance events?

Remember the meet information becomes part of the rules of the meet. By the way, I'm pleased that here in Pacific Swimming it is now mandatory to have the Meet Referee review the meet information before it is sanctioned. That way any incorrect or ambiguous language can be cleared up before the information is distributed.

Now that we are confident in our knowledge, what can we do to maintain a calm attitude at the meet.

Be Proactive - not Reactive.

In other words, know what kind of a meet you're refereeing, then run through it in your mind ... you should be knowledgeable enough of meet procedures to be able to anticipate where problems may occur and be prepared to fix whatever does go wrong. To do that, today's Referee needs more knowledge and experience than ever before

Many of you have heard me describe the simplicity of swim meets when I first started officiating about 35 years ago -- how many of you remember the old 30-second and 10-second watches? We had three dial watches on each lane and that was our timing system! How many of you remember the "3-ball" system-- or have heard me describe it before? We had three balls -- blue, red and white. A blue ball was thrown into the lane of the swimmer who touched first, a red in the second place swimmer's lane, and a white one into the third place lane. Then someone followed behind and handed the swimmer a matching color ribbon. That was our judging and awards system! Pretty simple!

Compare that to the touchpads, scoreboards, push buttons, strobe lights and computers that are commonplace at most meets today -- and the newest innovation, on-line entries -- and you'll realize how much more complicated the job of referee has become. In fact, it's getting more complicated -- the Spring Nationals in Austin will be a trial run for accepting entries on-line for National Championships.

But, as part of being proactive, don't forget to stay "brushed up" on the basics! When your computer crashes - can you still seed and score a meet by hand? When your timing system goes out - do you still know how to determine an official time from the three watches I hope you have available.

Yes, I have had a meet where everything went wrong and we had to go back to the 3-watch system -- but, luckily, not the 3-balls!

Another step that will help you attain that calm, confident attitude -- know every other job on the deck. How can you instruct other officials and help them solve problems if you don't know what they're doing? If you're aware of the duties and procedures of all your meet personnel - you can often suggest methods to prevent problems. Remember when we used to have problems at check-in with swimmers saying, "I checked in, they just didn't hear me - or they marked the wrong line"? Well, that was when we started making swimmers initial their check-in and the problems are much fewer now.

We have often emphasized contacting your Meet Director before the meet to make sure the facility and equipment will be ready. You need to become familiar with the conditions and restrictions of the pool...especially if you've never worked a meet there before. Maybe your timeline shows the meet is going to run past sundown -- don't wait until the day of the meet to find out the pool doesn't have adequate lighting after dark! But, I'm sure most of you have seen the Referee's Checklist that has been available for years -- if you haven't, let me know and I'll send one to you -- so I'll only cover one more item on the list.....

One of the most important -- make sure before the meet that you are going to have enough officials. Swimmers are much more likely to be judged fairly when there is a full complement of officials on the deck rather than too few. Mistakes are more likely to occur when a turn judge is trying to watch 4 lanes turn at the same time and just catches a glimpse of something out of the corner of his eye. With too many lanes to watch, it's easy to miss the quick slip touch on the breast or fly and be convinced it was a one-hand touch. Remember the goal is consistency - - if you really want to see a coach come unglued -- see what happens when his swimmer is disqualified for something and the swimmer in the very next lane, who did the same thing, is not!

Let's move on to the next phase ... **Administering the Meet**. What attitudes do we need to make this a successful meet for everyone -- the swimmers, coaches, parents and spectators. As the highest ranking official at the meet -- how do you perceive your authority? How should you perceive it? Years ago, I found the best advice for referees in a quote from Peter Drucker in Fortune Magazine:

Rank does not confer privilege or give power. It imposes responsibility.

Let's compare two different referees -- one who perceives his authority at a swim meet as "having power". The other perceives it as "accepting responsibility". There's a big difference. The first, who perceives it as "power" will think -- I can run this meet any way I want to in accordance with my own philosophies and feelings. He may even perceive himself as being "kinder" than other referees, so he may decide not to apply the scratch rule, to let in swimmers who forgot to check in and to take "deck entries" from those swimmers who forgot to enter an event. What can it hurt?

Well, for one thing -- he isn't being fair to all those swimmers who filled out their entries correctly, did check in, and didn't miss their event. Remember that part of our "attitude" is "perspective", keeping *all* swimmers in mind not just the one with a problem? In addition, those who didn't have to abide by the rules will now think they can get away with doing the same thing at the next meet -- so he's just made the job of the next Referee a lot harder.

Our second Referee, who perceives his authority as an "acceptance of responsibility" thinks "it is my responsibility to run this meet in accordance with the rules, making sure they are applied equally to all swimmers."

By accepting his own responsibility, this Referee also teaches the swimmers to accept the responsibility and consequences of their own actions or inaction -- a valuable lesson in life.

Let's proceed to get the meet started with our two different referees.

Our "power" referee tends to be a 'dictator', telling people what to do in an arbitrary "this is my way and this is the way it's going to be" manner. Have you ever noticed the "ripple effect" of people's attitude. The people who have been subjected to this type of approach become resentful and tend to adopt the same manner when dealing with the people they come in contact with, usually swimmers and coaches. Now you have this same unfriendly, uncooperative attitude spreading around the deck. Not the right way to start a meet.

On the other hand, our "responsible" Referee knows that one of his or her main responsibilities is to instruct and help the other people working the deck. Rather than becoming a 'dictator', he approaches the job like a 'team leader'. First, build the team -- make everyone feel they are important to the meet and establish a mutual feeling of respect and trust.

If you can pass on your attitude of responsibility and professionalism to everyone else, you'll make your own job a lot easier and create a much better environment for the swimmers.

If you want the meet to go smoothly, you've got to let people know what you expect of them - and what they can expect from you. Tell them how you plan to do things and what they can do to help you -- and then don't forget to ask what you can do to make their job easier. A few examples --

Are you taking relay entries on the deck? Check with the Clerk of Course and computer operator to see how much time they need to process the entries -- then set your entry deadline. Inform the coaches at your coaches meeting and also make sure it's announced several times.

Talk to your announcer and coordinate the timing of announcements. Do you want him to announce the next heat when all swimmers have touched the wall or when you blow your short series of whistles for each heat? Or is the Starter going to do that? Perhaps more importantly, when do you want the announcer to **stop** announcing. At the series of whistles or when you blow the long whistle? Do you want him to announce birthdays and snack bar ads? Or do you want him to check with you before announcing anything out of the ordinary? *This may depend on whether it's a small meet with lots of time, or a very large meet where everything has to keep moving.*

Chances are you'll be using automatic or semi-automatic timing equipment. Talk to your equipment operators regarding procedures to be followed if the primary system fails. Remember the rulebook says it is the Referee's responsibility to determine if a malfunction has occurred. Make sure your Timing Judge knows the procedures for making a Timing System Adjustment if a malfunction does occur. Even with the new computer programs that calculate the timing adjustment for you -- it still requires judgment. Is the primary system time wrong? Or is your back-up time inaccurate? Should all lanes be used when calculating an adjustment? Or is there a lane that is really "out of whack"? Don't be impatient and just assume that the fastest time is always right!

It's always a good idea to tell your Timing Judge and Equipment Operators to let you know immediately if there is a pattern of inaccurate timing in any lane. You might be surprised at what you find!

True story - Masters meet at Santa Clara several years ago. We had a three-button semi-automatic system, with one person in each lane operating both a button and a watch. Teams had been assigned to staff certain lanes so there was a continual rotation of new people into each lane. Second day of the meet, we suddenly noticed one lane where the watch time and one button was consistently nearly a full second faster than the others. We asked the Head Timer to investigate -- it seems the timer pushing the button and watch was brand new and thought that whenever the swimmer entered the area with the solid-colored red floats on the lane lines, you could stop your watch and push the button! Honest!! Well, needless to say we had a quick retraining session with that timer!

Those are just a few examples of why you want to maintain a constant rapport and communication with those overseeing various parts of the meet! When you meet with your team members, draw a clear line between the decisions you will expect them to make on their own and those that you want referred to you. In general, any matter within their jurisdiction that is clearly covered by the rules would be their decision; anything requiring judgments and decisions outside of their jurisdiction or that might set a precedent should be referred to you.

I can't emphasize enough the part about setting a precedent -- remember the decisions you make on the first day of the meet establish a precedent for the rest of the meet. Swimmers are entitled to know that what you do for one swimmer you will, under the same circumstances, do for any other swimmer. So - make those first decisions very carefully!

For the same reason, you will want your officials -- particularly if you're lucky enough to have an Administrative Referee and a couple of deck referees -- to keep you informed of the decisions they make so you can be sure the rules are being equitably and consistently applied to all swimmers.

One of your most important meetings before the meet starts will be with the Stroke & Turn Judges -- make sure they are up-to-date on all the rules and that they are interpreting them the same. If there is something you've been having trouble with in your area -- like the downward butterfly kick on the breaststroke -- set some guidelines -- some reference points for them to follow. You'd be amazed at how much a few well-chosen words at the beginning of the meet can help consistency. Remind your S&Ts to be professional in their manner - they are not out to "get" anyone. They are competent "observers" who report violations of the rules. They should be especially careful when informing very young swimmers of a DQ --

I have had complaints about otherwise excellent S&T Judges being extremely harsh when talking to the swimmers. But then don't go too far the other way --

Remember it is also the Referee's responsibility to define the jurisdiction of the Stroke & Turn Judges. If you're lucky enough to have one, you can turn this meeting over to your Head S&T or Chief Judge, otherwise it will be your responsibility.

Before you actually start the meet -- there is one more group that you want to make part of your team -- the coaches! Too often, there tends to be a "we vs. they" attitude between coaches and officials, although we have made great strides over the years in closing that gap. We are all at a swim meet for the same reason -- to see that the swimmers compete under the best and most equitable conditions we can provide. Always have a coaches' meeting at the beginning of the meet -- so they can voice any concerns and you can inform them of any conditions that will affect their swimmers -- some examples:

What's the timeline for the meet and where is it posted? Is it just an estimate or will you make sure events don't start before the posted time. If it's an estimated timeline, I usually post a note alongside the timeline stating that events may start earlier or later than estimated, but that I will also try to periodically note the actual start of each event on the timeline so they will know whether the meet is running early or late.

We used to let the coaches know whether there was going to be a lunch break -- but we don't seem to have those anymore!

Will you call for swimmers that don't appear at the blocks (*this may depend on the class of meet you're running*) -- how many times will you call -- once? twice? Then make sure you let your starter know that too so you can follow that exact procedure for each swimmer that isn't there.

If you're running a novice or C-B type meet, you might ask the coaches to acquaint themselves with the referee or referees who will be on the deck and then point them out to their swimmers.

How many times have beginning swimmers become confused and not known who to turn to on the deck because they forgot their heat or lane - or someone else got on the blocks when they thought they were supposed to be swimming. Have the coaches tell their swimmers "If you're confused or anything unusual happens --

immediately tell the Referee who can hold up the heat until things are straightened out. If they try to get back to their coach, it will be too late!

Another thing you may not have thought of -- if you've defined some stroke guidelines for your Stroke & Turns, don't be afraid to also tell the coaches what you will be looking for. I believe it is absolutely essential that coaches and officials communicate on stroke interpretations. After all, the coaches are the ones who teach the swimmers *how* to do the strokes. Officials, in turn, judge whether they are done legally. It seems only logical that coaches and officials should know each other's viewpoint. You can save a lot of protests that way -- and if you can establish a rapport with the coaches before the meet starts, you'll have taken a giant step toward making sure everything goes smoothly.

Well, by now our "power-driven" referee has probably alienated a lot of people, while he runs around trying to direct everything himself. On the other hand, our "responsible" referee has built himself a pretty impressive "team" -- one he can trust and delegate things to.

In the meantime, warm-ups are over and the pool has been cleared. You have met with everyone involved with running the meet, and you're just five minutes from the starting time. Are your timers all in place?

If you're like most of us and sometimes have trouble getting enough timers, this is a good time to play the National Anthem and run a time check that involves sounding the starting signal -- that brings in the parents who have been hiding out in their cars until the last minute so you wouldn't ask them to time!

Let's assume you're ready to put the first heat on the blocks. A lot has been written and discussed about running the competition at swim meets -- I know you already know that you have to be aware of and alert to everything going on in and around the pool and you also know how many whistles to blow at the start of each heat.

By the way, most people think that blowing the whistle is the only thing a referee does So, let's skip these easier parts of the Referee's job and go on to our next phase -

HANDLING PROBLEMS AND PROTESTS

Let's apply our "acceptance of responsibility attitude" to solving some of the problems you just knew were going to come up

(1) The swimmer whose entries didn't arrive don't you always have someone who says "I mailed my entries but I'm not in the psyche sheet"! If I can't find evidence that loss of the entry was the fault of the host club or computer entry person -- and it often is, I usually ask for some proof of entry, i.e. an entry in the parent's checkbook showing the entry fees were paid prior to the deadline, a copy of the entry or whatever. The important part of handling this problem is that you apply the same parameters to any swimmer in the same circumstances.

(2) The swimmer who misses his/her event. You write a "no show" slip and, hopefully, you've told the Clerk of Course to check and make sure this was not a Clerk of Course error, i.e. they just forgot to scratch the swimmer. If it was, you, of course, tear up the "no show" slip. If it was not, this is about the time the missing swimmer appears next to you and says "It wasn't my fault!". I just had that happen at a Senior Meet a couple of months ago. I asked the swimmer - an 18-year old boy - why it wasn't his fault and his reply was "Well, I was still in the warm-up pool and they started my heat!" Needless to say, the "no show" penalty was upheld.

That raises the question -- when do you use a "DQ for delay of the meet" instead of a "no show" penalty -- this practice was actually started to avoid having swimmer's deliberately false start because they didn't want to swim an event -- in fact, I believe it's still called a "declared false start" in high school swimming. It allowed the swimmer to tell the referee "I'm here, but I'm not swimming the event" without disrupting the other swimmers in the heat. The ironic part is that today the deliberate false start wouldn't work because we no longer call the heat back, but the "DQ for delay" still remains. I would also use this instead of applying the "no show" penalty if missing the heat was really not the swimmer's fault, i.e., if I could verify that a timer or other official told the swimmer he was in the next heat, not this one. I would not use it indiscriminately just to be "kinder" to one swimmer than another -- always remember what you do for one swimmer you must do for all in the same circumstances!

(3) Clerk of Course error - these do happen even with all of our computer seeding these days! Typical instance - the Clerk comes running up to tell you they scratched a swimmer by mistake in the event you are now running. So you suddenly have 7-swimmers for Heat 1 in a 6-lane pool. If you're lucky, the Clerk will also have mistakenly left in a swimmer who is not there - so you can just substitute your 7th swimmer in that lane. However, if all 7 of your swimmers are there it's still no problem, right? We have all learned that the easiest thing is to

take the Lanes 1 and 6 swimmers and, along with the extra swimmer, create a new heat 1A. That's an easy one.

Similar situation - 10 & under event. Suddenly a cute little 5-year old pops up at your elbow and says "somebody just swam in my lane"! Oops - well, at least her coach must have told her who to talk to. You immediately, of course, have the announcer call for the swimmer who just swam in the lane in question. Unfortunately, this turns out to be a 10-year old who was supposed to be in Heat 7 instead of Heat 2. In this case, do you subject the 5-year old to swimming in Heat 7 with the fastest 10-year olds? Do you disqualify the swimmer who swam in Heat 2 by mistake? I hope you all know the answer to those questions is - No. In the case of the 5-year old, you'll again pull the two outside lane swimmers from the next heat and create a Heat 2A so she can swim with her peers. The 10-year old is not disqualified since the rulebook says that it is the Head Lane Timer's responsibility to determine "that the swimmer...is...in the correct lane, heat and event." Actually that was pretty easy too, wasn't it?

(4) Referee's Disqualification: I know that we have often discussed when should the referee call an infraction he or she personally observes? My philosophy, as many of you know, is to call only those flagrant violations that can be seen from anywhere around the pool in any lane -- like the swimmer who starts freestyle in a butterfly or breaststroke event or the I.M.'er who does the strokes in the wrong order.

The rulebook tells us that "The Referee shall insure that all swimmers shall have fair, equitable and uniform conditions or judging." (102.16.6) If, as Referee, I called every infraction that I saw in the lanes right next to me, I would be subjecting those lanes to double the stroke & turn coverage that the other side of the pool had certainly not an equitable or uniform condition of judging.

To maintain that "fair and uniform" judging -- observe the way your deck officials are doing their job. Are they competent and conscientious? Could you wholeheartedly vouch for their actions and decisions -- you may be asked to! If you could not -- don't hesitate to tactfully and patiently offer construction criticism and instruction. But - if the official is still not doing an adequate job, he must be replaced. If your only choice is been "bruising someone's ego" or allowing an incompetent official to remain on the deck, your decision must be based on what's best for the competitors.

(5) Balancing the deck: Another ticklish question -- if you find one judge is writing all or nearly all of the disqualifications -- watch the pool and find out why. If you think the calls are being made incorrectly, you must over-rule them and re-instruct or remove the official. But, as is more likely, if you find this is actually your most competent judge and the other judges are not calling some of the infractions they should be -- you have a more difficult situation.

Do you have enough people to replace the other stroke & turns? Can you rearrange your assignments to put someone of equal ability on the other half of the pool to "balance the deck"? If you can't, you may have to replace that one really competent judge and have him or her work with each of the other judges in turn to raise their level of competence.

"Balancing the deck" can be one of your most difficult problems as a referee -- particularly if you are short of officials. Whatever your solution to this problem, if it provides "fair, equitable and uniform" conditions of judging, it will probably be right.

(6) The Unexpected: No matter how good a job you have done at being proactive, there are still going to be unusual and unexpected things that happen at a meet. You'll have to come up with the right decision on how to handle them quickly! Well, for us "older" referees, there is good and bad news. The bad news -- the quickness of your brain function deteriorates each decade after 20! But - the good news: Experience makes up the deficit! So you should still be able to handle these "unexpected" problems. Let's look at a couple of true examples of those "unexpected delays" that have happened to Walt and I:

(A) During warmups at an age group meet, the lane line anchors pulled out of the concrete wall on two lanes! There was no way to replace them. What do you do? Well, you certainly don't panic - if you do everyone else will too. If you stay calm, the people around you will start finding solutions for you! In our case, we had a creative Meet Director who braced two blocks of wood behind the upper and lower lips of the gutter and tied the loose lane lanes to those. It worked fine!

(B) How many of you have had a ball land in the pool in the middle of a race? I think the last one I had was a basketball! Or how about somebody triggers the false start rope and it falls into the pool! As we all know, the solution to those depends on whether they interfered with any of the swimmers.

(C) Although after 35 years I've learned to "expect the unexpected" -- some things are more unexpected than others. How many of you were at the Santa Clara Masters' Meet a few years ago when, just as we were ready to put a heat in the water, two very amorous ducks landed in the middle lane? Since no one wanted to interrupt their passionate conduct, we did hold up the heat until they realized they were being watched and flew away.

(7) Protests: A true barometer of how far we have come over the years is in the reduced number of protests at a meet. When I first started officiating, it was commonplace for the referee to receive half a dozen protests - in writing - at a meet. He would then have to investigate and answer those protests - also in writing. How many of you have received written protests at a meet in the last couple of years? I think that accurately reflects the increasing trust between officials and coaches.....the fact that we can verbally discuss our differences without resorting to formal protests.

But somewhere along the line you probably will have to handle a protest. The most common usually start with a coach charging down the deck vehemently protesting some disqualification or you are faced with an emotional and often tearful appeal by a swimmer and parent against your decision or that of another official. Be careful!

Did you know that studies have shown that our opinion of a person is formed in the first 10 to 15 seconds -- and that that opinion influences our subsequent actions or judgments?

Keep an open mind -- just because the coach yelled at you, don't make a snap judgment against him (*that's what our "power-driven" referee would do*) - Our "responsible-type" referee remembers he's the judge - not an adversary! Judges listen carefully to both sides of an argument, consider those arguments within the framework of any laws or rules that apply and only then do they reach a decision.

With the tearful swimmer, your first instinct is to react sympathetically and benevolently -- but your decision here too must be based on what happened and the rules that apply.

So, how do you handle the irate coach protesting a stroke & turn call? Off the deck -- with courtesy, patience and common sense. If the coach is really upset, allow him to calm down first -- you can do this a couple of ways:

(1) Let him talk, while you listen -- often this is all that is needed -- and you will find you can then discuss the matter calmly. Sometimes the best solution is patience!

(2) If that doesn't resolve the issue, after hearing his arguments, tell him you will be glad to look into it and report back to him. This gives the coach a "cooling-off" period and, at the same time, allows you time to consider the protest and check out the facts.

Do you have the authority to over-rule a judgment call? Yes. The Referee always has the power to over-rule an official on any infraction he personally observes (102.13.1). But use this authority wisely -- if you didn't see the infraction, you should thoroughly investigate the disqualification being questioned and only if a rule was incorrectly applied or it appears that a mistake was made should you over-rule it.

Which brings me to a final admonition -- don't be trapped into upholding a decision only because your ego is on the line and you don't want to admit a mistake may have been made (*another common trait of our "power-driven" referee*). As a "responsible" referee you are aware that you are not the most important person at a swim meet, neither are the coaches, the parents or the stroke & turn judges. The most important persons at a swim meet are the swimmers -- and decisions should always be made in the context of providing "fair and equitable conditions of competition" for ALL of them! Remember knowledge and experience may be the basis for your decisions, but attitude -- the manner in which you handle and communicate them -- is what makes your judgments acceptable.

AFTER THE MEET: At the end of the meet, our "power-type" referee probably thinks "I really kept control of that meet and ran it well". Our "responsible" Referee knows better -- he didn't run that meet all by himself. He remembers to acknowledge the contributions of all the members of his team and makes them feel appreciated. We have trouble recruiting officials -- but maybe if we made more of an effort to make them feel respected and appreciated it would help. A hint to host clubs -- even a small token of appreciation such as a pin and a thank you note can make an official feel his efforts have been worthwhile and maybe he'll work your meet again next time.

Well, let's hope your swim meet went well and all the problems and protests were resolved. Did you make any mistakes? Are there things you could have done better? Of course there are -- none of us is perfect. But we learn from our mistakes and every meet adds to our experience.

For every official a program of continuing education is necessary. As a referee, periodically work all the other positions at a swim meet -- remember what the view is like from a timer's chair, what it's like to be inundated with paper at the timing machine and desk, how it feels to stand on the deck all day as a stroke & turn -- you'll really learn why problems happen and how to prevent them. Attend clinics - and give them - there is no better way to learn or relearn something than to teach it. And while we're teaching the rules and procedures of officiating, we should also never forget to teach the attitudes we expect our officials to have on the deck!