

OPEN WATER SWIMMING OFFICIALS GUIDE

Open Water Referee check list to facilitate the planning, physical preparation, conduct, and wrap-up of a Open Water competition.

PLANNING

1. Referee, meet director, key staff members should be named and circulated at the earliest date possible.
2. Connect with the meet director & host regarding the meet information, host hotels, travel arrangements.
3. Communication amongst these key people, (the leadership team), with the details and variables that will occur with each race and course.
4. The meet director should make available to this group a video and/or a drawing (plat map) of the proposed meet site and race course, including, starting area, several course alternatives if needed, finish area (if different from the start), and areas for the Technical Meeting, check-in, hospitality, safety, timing/scoring tables. Discussions should occur with the leadership group to align everyone with the meet plan. A list of key officials and local staff should be proposed at this time.
5. Review the information that has been distributed in the meet book, discuss the start/finish set-up, water conditions (temp, depth, currents, safety needs, course markers, and other environmental issues). Contingency plans for those variable unknowns (changing weather conditions, water level in the lake, more meet entries than expected).
6. When the referee will arrive & where he/she will Stay.
7. List the personnel who will be doing the entries, identifying athletes with numbers and who will check them while they are competing and finishing. It is important that the athlete identification is easily applied to the athlete, will not wash off during the swim and is easily recognized.

SET UP

1. This is primarily the job of the meet host and the meet director. The referee must have input and a vision of what method will work to provide the athletes the best opportunities. Time is of the essence in that there must be enough time allowed to prepare for the race.

2. The start and finish points must be carefully planned and understood by all. All Open Water Championship meets require in-water starts and finishes. The referee must envision how the start will proceed, how the start line will be marked, where the starter and the equipment will be stationed so the starter will have a stable view of the starting line to assure a fair start and the athletes safety as there can be a lot of congestion at the start. Timing equipment must be placed so that the operator can see the start and finish. A large clock showing the elapsed time is very helpful to coaches and spectators. Video equipment recording the finish is mandatory for selection meets and is advisable if there is no electronic timing system.

3. The course set up is one of the more hectic parts of the preparation for the race. The placement of the course buoys which mark the race path and the turns need to be done as close to the preliminary information as possible preferably with a GPS system. Positioning of turn boats and escort craft must be well thought out in advance. In the longer open water race (25K) there are escorts for each competitor. Consider marking the course in advance using anchors with ropes and floats so that on race day, the buoys can be attached quickly.

THE COMPETITION

Technical Meeting...reviews all of the details of the race.

A complete description of the course layout is mandatory.

Carefully described to the athletes and coaches the sequence of turns and which shoulder is closest to the buoy at the turn. Turning off of the wrong shoulder could be a disqualification.

Check-in procedures and check-in times, and boat draws if it is an escorted race (25K), rules of competition, water conditions, tides, start procedure, withdrawal Procedures, and safety issues. Introduction of the officiating team, technical jury, and the meet director and his/her staff. Changes can arise from issues that are part of the meeting so be prepared to resolve them for the benefit of the athletes safety and needs.

Officials Briefing.....where assignments are made and rules of competition and procedures are reviewed. The meet referee should inform the others what each job requires relative to the rules. The briefing can be before or after the Technical Meeting.

THE EVENTS.....

The meet referee and assistant referee should be in boats on the course with one observing the leaders of the men's race and the other observing the leaders of the women's race. The referees are there to observe that swimmers do not draft or physically impede other competitors. Races may be combined based on the number of entries. The meet referee is also the official who is charged with making disqualifications based upon his/her observation or other officials observations that are reported to the Referee. The referee must keep a count of athletes who are out on the course. Everyone on the race course, no matter what their job, should assist the Referee and the Meet Director in assuring the safety and well-being of all competitors.

THE COMPETITIONcontinued

The administrative referee has a number of tasks relative to swimmer identification, eligibility, finish times, and scoring. The admin must work with the local people who are doing the entries, timing operation, clerk of course, swimmer identification (numbering)/placing, and scoring/awards.

The starter should be comfortable with the plans for the start of the wave (heat). Don't surprise the starter with last minute changes. Sound equipment should be loud enough so that the instructions can be heard by the athletes and the timing officials. With multiple waves in the race, it is important for all to be aware of the time interval between waves and a five minute count down before the start so the athletes are prepared for the correct start time. It may also be necessary to have another official in the water at the start area to make absolutely sure that the instructions are heard by the athletes and that the starter and the timers are in proper communication. The official in the water has similar duties as a deck referee would have in a pool meet.

Turn judges are placed at appropriate positions on boats, piers, or other vantage points where they can observe that athletes properly round the turns. They must make note of any violations and identify the athlete who turned incorrectly. Those observations of potential violations must be communicated to the meet referee in a timely manner.

Finish judges stationed with a clear view of the athletes as they complete the race. They must write down the placing while keeping their writing materials dry. A two person method of one calling out the finish sequence to His/her partner who writes the finish on a tally sheet. Three teams are very helpful. In those instances where watch timing is applied, the two person method for calling out times for a specific athlete is essential. Even with automatic timing, some similar means of personally observing the finish is extremely important.

THE COMPETITIONcontinued

Safety Officer and Medical Officer appointed to assure the safety and welfare of the athletes. These officials oversee the implementation of the safety plan. Note that power boats must stay clear of the swimmers so that they aren't affected by fumes and the wake of the boat.

Completion of the races.....

At the finish of the race, there are large amounts of compilation of times, finish lists, and possible disqualifications that must be recorded for posterity and awards. Open water has a number of scoring schemes that need to be dealt with. The top men's finishes, the top women's finishes, the top men's team scores, the top women's team scores, and the top combined team scores are the items the admin referee must process. The scoring and awards should be done in a timely fashion for the benefit of all as many will want to leave the venue right away. To bring about the timely tabulation of the scores, it is a good idea to start the process while there still may be swimmers out on the course.

Awards may be determined as soon as a sufficient number of athletes have finished the race. Various reports of the race results must be forwarded to head coaches of each participant and USA Swimming headquarters.

Thank all of the volunteers, meet staff, and officials who made this event a big success.

"Open Water Swimming should be a safe and fun environment with a level playing venue for the athletes so that they leave the event having a very good experience that is enjoyable."