

Report on

2006 USA Swimming Officials Training Workshop

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What Coaches Should Expect from an Official - Mike Nielson, Former Coach and now USA Swimming Facilities Director

How informed are coaches v. officials? Question: should it be mandatory for coaches to take and pass officials tests? Not there yet, but we could be headed in that direction.

What principles should guide officials? Officials deal with the WHAT; coaches deal with the HOW. Observe, but don't tell swimmers how to do it (in numerous LSCs, officials still deliver DQs to swimmers). It may be well-meaning, but not appropriate.

We need to see the sport as a pyramid: the athlete is at the top of the pyramid, supported by coaches and officials (and parents other volunteers) at the base.

It helps sometimes to attempt to visualize what you may face on the deck and see the right way to use skills to deal with the following:

- Confrontation
- Disagreement
- Explanation
- Clarification
- Mediation/Negotiation

In any event, officials need to know how to deal effectively with these situations.

Common Goals for Coaches and Officials:

- Know the rule book
- Know what good and great swimming look like (and not DQ'ing "great swimming" on the butterfly kick on the breaststroke)
- Know and use the proper etiquette — be professional
- Set an example for the athlete – no arguing; negotiate, but don't argue) – You are being watched by someone all the time — parents, officials, swimmers. Be the official everyone would want you to be.

- Remember: ½ of a conversation is LISTENING. HEAR them out, whatever the problem.

Problem Starters:

Body language can set you up for problems. Stereotyping doesn't stop at the "poolhouse gate." Different people have different signs that communicate nonverbal messages. People notice. Try to be alert and focused; use body language positively to disarm, rather than create barriers to communication. The best approach: be receptive and be there to serve. If that is your attitude, the body language will most likely fall in line or otherwise be overcome by your attitude.

Meet Levels

The problems you face will probably be different at different level meets. Be enabling, i.e. work with the coaches to recognize where the athletes are and get what they need. Don't let calls go. Officials can help coaches work with their swimmers. At the beginning level, they may need more on the basic educational front; at mid-level, it may be seeing more that swimmers simply don't get it in terms of certain specific strokes; in higher level meets, it should be more letting mistakes come to you. Be sure and be right, especially at higher level meets where swimmers are far more experienced and so much is at stake. In no case should you try to hammer swimmers.

Do's and Don'ts

Do's: make eye contact; listen and think; evaluate the situation; always be sure or don't act hastily; tell the swimmer what they did wrong; learn to speak softly with a smile.

Don'ts: don't look around in a disinterested manner; don't have preconceived notions; don't judge the person; don't be afraid to change your mind; don't tell them how to do it right; don't scowl and have a bully attitude.

Word of Advice: Having a sense of humor is a gift — knowing when and how to use it is an art.

Coaches and parents have a special impact on swimmers. Always remember that because they will.

Up and Coming Issues on Facilities:

Air quality for parents, children, spectators

Water quality for swimmers

Meets have been stopped and venues changed because of high chlorine levels, with some participants taken to hospital; other pools have been closed because of improper filtration. They are now looking at ultraviolet treatment of water to replace chlorine.

CDC is starting to look into this. Depending upon standards that may come to be set when this is investigated more carefully, it could potentially shut down the sport. More initiatives are at least two years away.

Top 10 Areas Athletes Look for in Officials - Rowdy Gaines, 1984 - 3 Time Olympic Gold Medal Winner and President, USA Swimming Foundation

- 10 - Passion: Athletes like to see a love for the sport. Let the Athletes see it, not in getting carried away, but in a simple, but evident, love for the sport.
- 9 - Authority - Officials are essential to sports. Make your authority known, but appropriately, in a manner that will gain respect. It is best if the whole "team" of officials can project this.
- 8 - Even Temper - The highs and lows for athletes are different from those of officials. Understand this. Don't let partisanship be seen in any way.
- 7 - Consistency - Must have the same call for everyone. Consistency is observed, and important.
- 6 - Experience - Athletes expect officials to know the rules better than anyone on the deck and to be able to apply them.
- 5 - Civility - Speak with, and treat, Athletes with respect. They will be undergoing an entire range of emotions in competition. Understand this and try to work around it in a respectful, understanding way.
- 4 - Verbalization - Let the Athlete know exactly what he/she did wrong. Be clear and concise. Be able to clarify it with confidence.
- 3 - Spirit of the Law v. Letter of the Law - Be sure that the rule was broken and that the call is valid. The benefit of any doubt goes to the swimmer. There is no time for empathy: move from the "how" to the "what" in seeing and making calls.
- 2 - Integrity - Hard to quantify, but Athletes are looking for integrity in officials.
- 1 - Safety - Athletes assume the environment is safe, that it is a haven where they can work out and perform their sport. Officials are expected to protect them in terms of water quality, air quality, pool safety, child abuse, etc.

Rules Update - Bruce Stratton, Chair, Rules Committee

The Governing Overview for the Rules is: fair and equitable conditions for competition; uniformity in interpretation and application; benefit of the doubt goes to the athlete and coach

We want to be as “friendly” as possible in applying the rules — try to accommodate the athlete to give them the best chance to compete..

It is virtually impossible to write a rule so that it will be interpreted the same by all people. What is needed is a concerted effort to change the mindset of officials to get them to read the rules and find a way to interpret the rules consistently according to their intent so that generally each swim is swum the way it is meant to be swum.

We have been trying to match USA Rules with FINA Rules. The U.S. is 1 vote out of 172 in approving the FINA Rules and has little influence.

On specific strokes:

- “upward” butterfly kick in the breaststroke arising from undulation of the body is ok; downward propulsive butterfly kick is not ok.

- to call alternating kick on the butterfly, you have to actually “see” the feet alternating in relation to each other

- on backstroke rule, discussion on language, but there is agreement on how it is applied

- on breaststroke rule changes, general understanding now seems to be clear; horizontal plane for the legs is no major change -- really little different than the existing requirement for the arms.

High School observed swims: if a swimmer is DQ’ed under NFHS Rules, it is still possible for the swim to count for USA Swimming if no USA Swimming Rule has been broken and the time then counts.

Hot Issues - Providing a Safe Environment for the Athlete and Philosophy of Officiating - Joel Black, Dan McAllen, Bruce Stratton, Mike Saltzstein

Child safety and abuse prevention i.e., child molesters, perverts and other potential mistreatment

- be aware of this potential problem, know your people, know your deck
- most attacks of this nature come from acquaintances, friends and family, not strangers (11% are strangers), but we need to be aware and take precautions. Child molesters want to get into a position of trust with the child. There can be molesters, but there can also be just plain perverts such as voyeurs, etc. The kids need to be sheltered from this as well.
- child abuse usually happens behind the scenes, not out in the open. Kids who have been abused are usually quieter, do not interact as well with you or their peers, are late, stop in practice, or show other warning signs through their behavior. Coaches should especially look for this.
- have a good meet marshalling system, including within the facility — locker rooms, etc.
- if something makes us uncomfortable, or if something is reported that makes us uncomfortable or brings something into question, we should take action and protect the athletes.
- options: report to facility; report to authorities; report to coach or parent — all as appropriate. Be careful what you say when you report something to anybody other than authorities because you may not have all of the facts. It may not be necessary for you to investigate, but someone else probably should. Take it to the right person and pass the information along for them to investigate. Don't report what you do not know as fact. Get information to the responsible party. Start the process. There are levels of information and levels of persons who may need to know. In some states, coaches may be required to report child abuse if they become aware of it.

- Camera phones are an issue at swim meets. Should they be banned from locker rooms? The deck? Under what rules? LSCs/home teams/facility can regulate.

- It's best for coaches in this present day environment not to touch swimmers, except to pat on the head. Officials should never touch a swimmer. Use your heat sheet or clipboard to tap them to get out of the way or to get their attention, if necessary. In no circumstances is it proper for a coach to wrestle or tickle a swimmer or have a swimmer sit on his/her lap.
- The conference heard from a representative of the YMCA on steps the YMCA takes to protect swimmers from child abuse. In addition to steps mentioned above, the Y trains and educates all staff and volunteers on child abuse prevention; institutes rigorous pre-employment screening, with background checks; and has several policies and procedures designed to deal with this issue. Moral: we need to be proactive in providing a safe environment for children in swimming.

New S&T Video — This is in the works. Filming has begun. They think it will be an improvement on the existing one. Not sure of completion date.

DQ Slips – Request made that new version include line for Team Name.

Meet safety — This is still an important issue. Meet Referee should place and manage the Marshals. From beginning of warmups and during a stroke/meet officials briefing, it is best to assign at least one official on deck at all times for safety and communication purposes. Entering the water properly is still a problem. Meet Referees have the responsibility to manage and monitor the meets for safety. One solution to educating coaches about proper procedures is to appoint coaches to be marshals.

Pacing Devices. There is a general consensus that a “watch” is not a pacing device. Swimmers often look up at the scoreboard to pace themselves. Rule 103.17 suggests LSCs should place pacing clocks at the sides of the pool during competition (which is rarely done). Use common sense.

Jurisdictions. New USA Swimming stroke briefing sets new jurisdictions at Championship meets. This is an attempt to conform to the FINA jurisdictions. Generally, stroke judges have jurisdiction wall-to-wall. Turn judges have jurisdiction to the end of the first stroke and the last stroke into the wall. S&T Judges thus have concurrent jurisdiction. Notwithstanding this briefing, it is still the Referee's responsibility to determine and assign jurisdictions to fit the circumstances. The Referee has the final word on jurisdiction in a meet. There are no “fixed” situation on jurisdiction. USA Swimming has given guidelines; God has given Referees a brain. Use common sense.

Calling DQs – We need to be careful about “overofficiating.” There is no reason to approach S&T looking for reasons to DQ a swimmer. The best calls are no calls. The benefit of the doubt does truly belong to the swimmer. Why not approach a potential call with the question: what can I do not to DQ a swimmer? There is no need to “get” every swimmer in the pool. Call what you see and see what you call. Don't call what you don't see. Calling “equally” is a trap. The rule does not use the word “equal.” We want to be fair and equitable, and not be concerned with being “equal” because all swims and all swimmers and all situations are never “equal.” The main problem in officiating comes from differences of experience and decision-making. We have a mixture on the deck. Swimmers expect to be “watched,” but not “inspected.” quality S&T calls for a good, calm demeanor, with vigilance, portraying and carrying out a confident observation of swims, with the deck completely covered in a proper way.

Non-Disqualifiable Motion on Starts - Question for new starters: what do you think the swimmers' positions should be after the Starter says “take your mark”? Motionless? Would it be a DQ for a swimmer to flex a leg muscle after “take your mark.”? No. The rule says that when all swimmers are *stationary*, the starter shall give the starting signal. A swimmer can be stationary and yet show motion, i.e., flexing a muscle. The standard is not motionless. It is whether the swimmer is stationary. See the swimmer in a “glass box” that he/she is required to stay in before the starting signal sounds. If the swimmer is stationary, and doesn't “break the glass,” there is no false start.

Volunteer Service - Is it giving you a “headache”? If so, take a step back, you’re overthinking the problem. Are you being “athlete-centered” is a good question to ask? Again, the best calls are no calls.

Values Based Officiating - the YMCA Approach - Y Rep

The Y has been engaged in discussions with USA Swimming about the Y’s programs and approach to swimming. This is something relatively new and the organizations are hopeful it will bring new perspectives to both organizations and their missions. One aspect is the child safety issue discussed above. Another is the Y’s mission statement and its impact on its program, particularly on officiating.

The Y brings its overall core mission statement to all of its activities, namely Caring, Honesty, Respect and Responsibility. For officiating, the question becomes: How can I, as an official, exemplify the character development values of caring, honesty, respect and responsibility?

Caring: Volunteerism in officiating itself shows caring; caring is found in all of the Y core values; in officiating, it includes taking time to solve problems, being positive, listening and, when explaining a disqualification, comforting the swimmer and making it educational.

Honesty: This means admitting errors, assessing and reassessing one’s own performance; it means administering the rules fairly for all swimmers at all times; it means making certain there is a level playing field; it extends as far as being honest enough to issue a disqualification to your own child.

Respect: In disqualifying a swimmer, it means being respectful and pointing out the positive as well as the negative; respect must be shown to coaches and their role as an advocate for their swimmers; it means welcoming new officials and not setting up unfair or artificial barriers to improvement and certification.

Responsibility: Doing your job well; being there on time, prepared and ready to work; doing what is right all the times and not just what is the popular thing to do.

The Y has an Officials’ Code of Ethics. It includes the core values discussed above, as well as statements of commitment to devote time and study of the rules, working with other officials in harmony and cooperation, not using positions for personal benefit, upholding the honor and dignity of all participants in swimming and being familiar with child abuse prevention and providing a safe environment for participants.

National Officials Certification Program - Bob Griffin, National Certification Committee Chair

Reasons for the change: -good old boy network posed barriers to working National meets
uniform -training for National certification had been *ad hoc* and not
 -some persons working meets were not experienced enough

The National program began with starters and has now progressed to all deck positions.

Officiating Qualities it is designed to advance: - participation
 - education
 - mentoring/feedback
 - knowledge
 - accountability (at home and beyond)

Little known statistic: 56% of people on the Championship Deck in the last three years had never worked that deck before. This is one goal of the new program, to break down barriers.

N1 - this is the standard category of certification; the National Committee will be doing nothing on this. This level is administered by the LSCs.

N2 - This is for the more experienced official and will be earned through evaluation by a National Evaluator (a list is being prepared) at regular qualifying meets after being observed for a minimum of 3-4 sessions.

N3 - This will require N2 certification for one year (it can be done concurrently) and two evaluations, plus working a national championship meet. The latter are qualifying meets at which swimmers with national cuts are swimming and at which the meet is being swum in a Champs format. There have to be an adequate supply of officials there to permit National Evaluators to do their evaluations. S&T will require at least 4 sessions of evaluation; Ref/Starter/CJ and Admin Ref will require evaluations at two meets in which the officials works 80% of the sessions. There will be interaction with the evaluator and then a report will follow, after which application can be made if the report is favorable. Once approved, it is necessary, as stated above, to then work a meet in the position. The card/badge is \$5.00.

To become an N3 Ref/Starter/CJ and Admin Ref , you have to be certified as an N3 S&T official, but you can work on it concurrently with other positions.

The USA Swimming/Volunteers/Officials website has all of the details. Checklists and guidelines will be issued for National Evaluators and will eventually be put on the website.

Some evaluators have been late in turning in reports (45 reports are outstanding). USA Swimming expects reports to be filed within 21 days of a meet.

Self Evaluation/ Traps & Pitfalls -- **Joel Black, Co-Officials Committee Chair**

Your LSC should have pre-meet and post-meet guidelines in preparing for, and evaluating, meets.

Post-meet guidelines should include the “The Swimming Officials - 10 Points of Self Evaluation”

Honesty is important at any time, not least after the completion of a meet. Reflection on the meet will hopefully produce growth and a better meet next time.

You need to know how to manage stress. When you see signs coming in a meet, take immediate steps to defuse, correct and remedy the situation. Vulnerabilities should be recognized and dealt with appropriately. One key: LISTEN. Another: BE AWARE OF THE RULES. Yet another: GET ALL THE INFORMATION YOU CAN. Finally: MAKE YOUR DECISION IN A SLOW, CAREFUL, CONFIDENT MANNER. You don't need to react quickly or shoot from the hip.

Evaluate how you're performing your job. In stroke & turn work, don't “inspect” swimmers. Don't bend over and eye ball them. Simply be in position and make a casual observation and do your job.

We need to keep a healthy state of mind about meets: (1) the perfect meet has yet to be run
(2) you are only as good as your last meet
(3) in swimming, patience is a virtue.

10 Points of Self-Evaluation:

Did I blow any calls?

Were there any times when it was fortunate that I didn't have to make a call?

Did I do everything I could to Ensure a Just Outcome?

Were my calls/decisions consistent?

Did I fail to maintain proper control at any time?

When did I feel most vulnerable to outside influences?

Were there any situations where I avoided or usurped responsibility for a ruling at the expense of another official?

Was there anything sabot my signals, gestures o style that evoked an unexpected or unwanted response?

Did I uphold, defend or rationalize any improper rulings?

Was there a particular aspect of my performance that I cold work on at the next meet?

Ten Other Questions - Did I:

Arrive at the meet on time?

Dress smartly and appropriately?

Conduct or participate in a beneficial pre-meet conference?
Look confident without appearing over-confident?
Give the proper signals in an appropriate manner?
Develop and maintain genuine teamwork with my partners?
Maintain proper positioning?
Place my hands on an athlete for any reason?
Treat all participants with the appropriate amount of respect?
Make every effort to defuse potentially volatile situations?

Six “Ps” to Remember and Reflect On In Being a Referee - Dan McAllen, Co-Officials Committee Chair

Philosophy: The Meet Referee’s distinction is Leadership. The Deck Referee carries out the game plan of fair and equitable execution of the swimming; the Meet Referee designs the game plan. He/she is the leader. He/she must demonstrate leadership skills. His/her selection of a leadership team is important. The selection of a Chief Judge is an important selection — a good Chief Judge makes for a well- organized, alert and informed deck. If the leadership team is skilled, it leaves room for placed less experienced and skilled people who can be mentored. Another key point is not to do it all yourself. Don’t be afraid to let people fail —you and your leadership team are there to help. Another key point is something that is often missing from the deck: “have fun.” Are we having enough “fun” should always be a question. Think of ways to bring “fun” into the picture.

Priority: Priority # 1 should be the athletes; #2 should be the athletes; #3 should be the athletes. After the athletes should be the coaches — as the support group for the athletes. What about the officials? Not so much concern. They are trained to take care of themselves.

Preparation: Like in real estate (where location, location, location is prime), in swimming officiating, preparation, preparation, preparation is prime. Referees should seek early involvement with meet directors which will improve chances of success at the meet. Read the meet invitation/information. Check it out and make sure it is accurate. Review and be aware of venue issues early on; hold and prepare for your coaches meeting and be ready to define the start times and timeline; look for and define any unusual procedures that may be necessary; set up juries; check water temperature; be aware that preparation or lack of preparation has consequences — good and bad. For the officials meeting, use your leadership team: get out of the way and let them do it — leadership is not a dictatorship.

Practical: Don’t try to be God. Don’t forget: you’re just a Meet Referee. You need to respect and understand the fact that others may be smarter and more talented than you are. Use those resources. Know who your leaders are. Be open and honest with people. If there are problems, let the coaches know and encourage them to be part of the solution. Tell them what the problem is, solicit input, tell them about the solution and see if you can get them to take ownership of it. Openness and honesty work.

Pliant: As they say, the best battle plans are great until the first shot is fired. Deal with the present situation and adjust. Make adjustments on the fly. If it isn't working, adjust to make it work. Be flexible, not rigid. Don't let the timeline rule and ruin a meet if something else is called for to remedy a situation.

Professional: This should be obvious. Know your job. Execute it with excellence. You are a swimming official who people expect to create a level playing field that works for the athletes. Look and act that way.

Patience: This is an essential quality that is needed throughout in all of your preparation and in the execution of the meet. Patience, patience, patience.

Traps and Pitfalls for the Referee - Dan McAllen, Co-Officials Committee Chair

1. Don't be a slave to a timeline. Watch and plan the meet size to make it work — number of events; number of swimmers. Why do we have to swim all events at every meet? Re: the timeline, a misguided attempt at “faster” can make the meet slower because errors are likely to creep in with undue speed. Whatever you do, don't get ahead of the timeline. There is no need to publish prelim timelines, but finals timelines should be published so all will know.
2. As a referee, respect your Stroke & Turn Judges. They are the most important officials on deck. The better job they do, the more respect the entire officials team on deck will have, and the easier it will be to do your job. Swimmers want the best people making stroke & turn judgments.
3. Be prepared to live with the precedents you set. When you embark on a course of action, you will be expected to follow it in each subsequent instance. People will see it and will expect consistency. Think about decisions before you make them in this light.
4. Be a leader, not a dictator. You are a professional, on display at all times. People are watching. The higher level of professionalism, the higher degree of excellence will be carried out at every level at a meet. Leave your God complex at home. You are not God. Avoid cliques. New people need to feel part of the team — welcome them. They are there to help you and help the swimmers. This is not a “good ol' boy” network. It is the Referee's responsibility to make sure that does not happen. People need to feel part of the team from the time they are an apprentice and going forward. Include them and welcome them. Be welcoming as a matter of course. Avoid creating conditions where the “them” versus “me” syndrome kicks in. You are a failure if people are leaving or not participating because they do not feel like they're part of the team. If someone has a real problem, channel them to a task they can do better.
5. If you overrule a call, talk to the official who made the call. Explain your reasons clearly. They have a right to be respected as part of the process and a right to know why you have chosen

not to accept their judgment. They are part of the team. Tell them and explain it to them.

6. Say your Thank You's — tell everyone you can — meet director, hospitality, announcer and the deck. You can't say thank you enough for all those who are helping you and making the meet run smoothly.

Submitted by Jim Knicely
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