

Speedo Winter Juniors West- December 2025

This was the third year in a row that I was able to attend the Speedo Winter Juniors West meet. This is one of my favorite meets to officiate largely because I see so many MN athletes and coaches. Although we are not supposed to talk to them on deck unless they talk to us first (we don't want to distract them), I truly enjoy just smiling at all the faces I recognize. I also hope that when the MN athletes see us MN officials on deck at these national decks, that it gives them a small sense of stability and encouragement.

As for the meet itself, my biggest learning point happened during a heat where there was a fairly long pause once the athletes were up on the blocks. I was surprised when the deck referee blew the long whistle again (with the athletes still up on the blocks) to get their attention and to restart the starting sequence. I was erroneously under the impression that the starter in that situation should say "swimmers" to get the athletes' attentions that the starter would soon say "take your marks." That may be true for 8 year olds but in most cases, I learned the correct response is to blow the long whistle again (I knew this was true for backstroke but somehow I didn't think it was true for forward starts once on the blocks). The reason for this is because athletes are so accustomed to a sequence of events (long whistle, then "take your marks") that we want to do everything we can as officials to get them back into their normal routine before starting the race.

I found the protocols at this meet easier to follow and remember than at many national meets. I mentioned this to the team lead CJ and she said they purposely tried to make them easy and consistent on the start and turn end because there were a lot of officials for whom this was their first national meet.

The protocol for backstroke starts and observing the ledge use involved hanging our arms out in front to signal we were observing and then putting them behind our backs when the athletes were ready and legal. This was easy and seemed to work well. In addition, we were instructed, "if it's not obviously illegal, assume it is legal" with the goal of not holding up the start of the race. In addition, there was no discussion or requirement put on us stroke and turn officials to check how deep the ledges were pulled (and they were adjustable).

After the highlight of seeing all the MN athletes and coaches, my second highlight was at the end of the meet when an official from FL who I respect and look up to told me, "I love watching you on deck because you seem so happy to be out there. You are professional in what you do and you look like you want to be there." That is truly how I feel and I am grateful for the opportunity to attend these national meets.

I truly had a delightful time and I hope I can bring back some of these skills and lessons learned to MN and our officiating here. I also thoroughly enjoyed being there with other officials from MN and would encourage others to find friends to attend with.

Kerra Mayor