

Jack Swanson – 2023 Winter Juniors Report December 6th-9th, 2023

I attended the 2023 Winter Juniors West in Westmont, Illinois as a Stroke and Turn official December 6th-9th, with a long course time trial meet on December 10th. This meet was included some of the fastest 18 and under athletes in the United States and was a high energy meet. This was my first meet at the Junior National level as an official. All of the other Stroke and Turn officials and members of the assigned team were very supportive and inclusive of all teams members. Below are some of the takeaways from the meet:

Unique Aspects of This Meet

- This meet was conducted in two pools in prelims, with the men competing in one of the pools, and the women competing in the other pool. Stroke and turn officials were assigned to one of the pools for the entirety of the meet. I was assigned to the women's pool. Finals were conducted in one pool. I was somewhat surprised to be assigned to one pool for the entirety of the meet rather than rotating between pools
- Because diving boards were present on the lane 8 side of the women's and finals course, we were unable to walk stroke at this meet. Stroke judges stood at the 15 meter marks for the entirety of the race.
- This meet was conducted with three chairs in finals – the right chair served as the stroke judge and had a backup button, the middle chair recorded watch times and rang the bell during distance events, and the left chair served as the relay takeoff judge and had a backup button and stopwatch. I only served as the middle chair in finals. I served as a turn judge at the turn end Wednesday, middle chair Thursday, a stroke judge Friday, and a turn judge at the turn end Saturday.
- Time trials were conducted approximately 30 minutes after the conclusion of each session, and officials with N3 certification were afforded opportunities to participate in assigned roles during time trials.

Learning Opportunities

- Deck protocol briefings at this meet were very brief, which sometimes led to confusion on protocols for officials newer to this level of meet. Thankfully, the CJ team was incredibly gracious in answering questions from the team members, especially those newer to the national deck. Because this meet was not televised, some aspects of protocol were not as 'strict' as they may have been at a Pro Series or national championship meet.
- It is always interesting to observe the assigned officials at national championship meets. The assigned officials clearly were very comfortable and calm on deck, particularly the Deck Referees. Interestingly, the Deck Referees did not move slightly beyond the flags as we train our Deck Referees in Minnesota – apparently due to the presence of a camera just beyond the flags.
- Several deaf or hard of hearing athletes participated in this meet. Starters used hand signals for their events. Starters were clearly very comfortable using hand signals. It served as a reminder that starters at the local level should always be prepared to use hand signals if requested.
- The deck followed a very clear chain of command, and officials stayed in their boxes and followed the chain of command. Our LSC championship meets need not be this strict, but the chain of command should be more clearly articulated at LSC championship meets so as to ensure our LSC championship meets run smoothly and to prepare officials for this level of meet.

It was a pleasure to attend this meet and to catch up with old friends and make new friends. I look forward to the next opportunity to officiate at a national meet!