

2009 Officials Training Workshop Report

San Antonio, TX – October 8-10, 2009

From: Jim Stromski

Overview:

The workshop featured presentations on the following topics with the stated presenters:

- FINA Rule Changes – Carol Zaleski
- USA Swimming Rule Changes from 2009 Convention and recent Interpretations – Bruce Stratton
- Chief Judge – Paul Jones and Bob Griffiths\
- Intro to Open Water - ?
- Starter – Jeannine Dennis and Pat Lunsford
- Swim Officiating, Coach and Athlete Perspective – George Block
- Meet Referee – Dan McAllen
- Deck Referee – Jim Sheehan
- Administrative Referee – Joel Black and Lucy Duncan
- Managing a Major Meet – Harold Cliff
- Swimsuit Inspections/ Underwater Replay – Carol Zaleski

There were, also, several breakout sessions and two 'Hot Topics and Burning Issues' discussions. Each of the preceding will be discussed.

Session - FINA Rule Changes

Carol explained the process of how rule changes are enacted by FINA. Basically, any Federation can bring a proposal and then all members vote on the proposed rule change. The major topic was, of course, the new suit rules and Carol mentioned a rewrite of the breaststroke rule intended for clarification. She then deferred to Bruce Stratton in the next session to fully discuss.

Personal Thoughts: The progression portion was okay, but the suit and breaststroke rule stuff has been well covered since late spring/summer.

Session - USA Rule Changes

Bruce discussed the process of USA Swimming rule changes. Proposals submitted through the LSC's by May 15th require a majority vote to pass and those after May 15th a 90% affirmative vote. At the end of May/beginning of June, the proposals are reviewed for grammar and clarity. The Rules Committee makes a recommendation to the USA House of Delegates and the proposal is posted on the USA website. The proposal is voted on at the USA House of Delegates meeting and, if passed, incorporated into the rulebook.

Suits

Rule change originally to take effect on 1/1/2010, but changed to Oct. 1st, 2009 in USA because of the High School and NCAA seasons starting. (*I'm not going to go over the suit requirements because they are well known at this point*) Bruce did mention some things to look for. They are:

- Shiny material
- Rubber/plastic panels
- Fasteners

A tip from Bruce was that, if someone protests a suit, 'Consult with other coaches. They know!'

Breaststroke Rule

The rule clarification was to that 'Any movement of the hands constitutes the initiation of the arm pull prior to the downward dolphin kick.' He also mentioned that the arm pull does not have to be continuous, meaning that the swimmer can start the arm pull, stop it, do the dolphin kick, and then complete the arm pull. This is legal because there is nothing in the rulebook that says a swimmer can't.

Other items from my notes

Backstroke Finish – The swimmer must not be wholly submerged prior to the finish of the race. A swimmer is not wholly submerged if even just the tip of their big toe is above the water. The finish of the backstroke is the instant that the swimmer contacts the wall. A DQ shall be called if it is observed that the swimmer was wholly submerged prior to the touch at the finish of the race. *The call can be made by a Stroke Official from the side as the Finish Judge watches the touch and shoulders.* The Referee should question the call, but it can and should be made.

Non Continuous Turn (NCT) – NCT is not a call. I know we all call it that, but we're to remember that if a call is questioned we have to be able to explain exactly what we saw (e.g. Rotated to breast, one arm pull, arm stopped moving, and the head did not initiate the turn).

DQ slips - Meant to be a communications device. Actual book language is not required as long as the infraction is clearly described. If questioned, they don't have to be tossed. They are meant as a communications device, not a legal document. (* This one meant a lot to me as this happened to me at last year's LSC Championship*)

Butterfly – The book says 'Arms recover simultaneously over the calm water.' It was explained that the arms mean shoulders to wrist and that there is not a 'see air between the arm and the water' requirement. We were told to think of a sailboat versus a submarine. The sailboat skims over the water even while it contacts it while the submarine is clearly underwater.

Scratch Rules – Meet invitations should state the scratch rules and must specify the penalty for violating them. If there is a scratch in a championship final, there is no penalty for the alternate if they are not present.

Positive Check-Ins – Positive check-ins are to be used for seeding purposes. If a swimmer does not check-in, they can still swim; they just won't be seeded by time (ie. Put in a heat with an open lane). There's a difference between checking in to be able to swim and checking in for seeding. The check-in policy should be clearly stated in the Meet Invitation.

Butterfly, Under Water Recovery – The natural flexing of the arms is okay. It does not constitute the initiation of a pull.

Personal Thoughts: Much better! There was a lot of spirited discussion on backstroke finish/submersion and arms in butterfly. A little surprised on the emphasis on the meet invite, but I guess it makes sense as those are the 'ground rules' for the meet.

Session - Chief Judge

A presentation on the Chief Judge's duties and responsibilities. The role was, also, compared at the National and LSC levels. The points made were to be taken as suggestions and are not mandatory. A lot of what was described was an extension of the referee duties. There is a lot more pre-meet work for officials at the National level than at the LSC level.

- Observes the other officials, their positioning, etc. An extra set of eyes and ears on deck.
- Checks status of timing equipment and operators, volunteer assignments, equipment (radios, etc.)
- Can be extension of the Referee, Assists Meet and Deck Referee
- Pre-Session – Reviews strokes, sets jurisdictions and protocols, Reviews previous session, distributes heat sheets, forms, equipment, etc.

- Assist defining an officiating process that works for *that* meet (can be different for each meet)
- Confirm and communicate DQ's, speak with athlete or coach, assist with paperwork
- Use rulebook language to cite infractions.
- Define Referee/Starter teams. The Chief Judge can rotate in as needed.
- Instruct, use, and enforce radio communication protocols.

There was a breakout session followed by discussion after the presentation.

Interesting tidbit – Florida LSC rules are that, for a team, there has to be 1 official for every 30 athletes. If there are more than 100 athletes on a team, there must be a Referee 'on' the team.

Personal Thoughts: As I move up the officiating ladder, I know there's a lot more involved than just watching swimmers. There's a lot more going on in the background than even I realized. It's a lot different reading the duties in the rulebook and having an in-depth discussion on them!

Session – Open Water

Open Water swimming is gaining in popularity. There was a quick review on some of the rules, but the underlying theme was that they're working on it:

- Referee's Guide in progress
- Mini-Clinics can be scheduled
- Starting and expending online tests for officials

Open Water Officials:

- Meet Referee – Ensures a safe, fair competition
- Assistant Referee – Handles yellow and red flag calls (2 yellow – 1 red, red = out)
- Administrative Referee – Handles roll call, finishes, etc.
- Starter
- Turn Judges (No cutting corners!)
- Timers and Finish Judges – Proper order of finish and assigning times
- Safety and Medical Personnel

More information: 10kswim.com and swimnetwork.com

Personal Thoughts: Interesting. Something a little bit different. I had my first exposure to Open Water swimming last summer. Not my forte, but I can see the appeal to others.

Session – Starter

Pat Lundsford described starting as 'an art' that takes practice. He also suggested to observe other Starters. False starts defined as leaving the mark prior to the signal. Tips for Starters:

- Responsible to ensure a fair start for all swimmers.
- Communicate with Referee to obtain best vantage point.
- Voice should be conversational and encouraging.
- Relax and breathe!
- Get experience and be good at at levels, National to Local.
- Patience! Send them at the 'right' time.
- Admit and learn from mistakes.
- Expect the unexpected!
- Keep your hands free.

- Be a teacher, help other officials progress.
- Keep up with changing philosophies.
- No cheerleading (in general)
- Have courage to do the right thing (in reference to false starts, bad exchanges, etc.)
- Be professional (looking good, uniform, etc.)
- Work each session/heat as if it were your last, that way you'll always be doing your best.
- Avoid 'step downs.' Dangerous for the athlete. Can stand swimmers up. Only step down if lengthy delay.
- 'The box.' Lots of discussion about what constitutes a false start. A swimmer who flinches (whole body, not just foot) is NOT in violation as long as they are not moving forward. We were told to envision a box. If the swimmer breaks the plain of 'the box' after taking their mark or are clearly leaving the platform, then a false start should be called.

Personal Thoughts: This was great for me as I'm just starting my second full year as Starter There really are two different schools of thought on the false start: those that think any movement after the swimmers come down is a false start and those (like myself) who believe that forward motion at the time of the signal is required for a violation. There's still controversy, but at least I have a real foundation to point to. Also, Pat was just a great presenter and really made the session fun and interesting.

Session – Hot Topics

- USA Swimming and YMCA are working towards cross certification. This is in the not too distant future as YMCA is using USA's online officials test with YMCA's 5 core value questions mixed in.
- Related, in a perfect world, we would be 'Swim Officials' not USA Officials, HS Officials, Y Officials, etc. There's still disagreement over some things (backstroke turns), but the divisions are narrowing and the hope is that in 10 years or so we will have 'Swimming Officials.'
- Recruiting and retaining officials. Good discussion and some ideas:
 - A comment was made that some people (parents, etc.) felt that existing officials were 'exclusive'. We (officials) need to be more inclusive. 'Extend the hand of welcome' as it were.
 - Ask someone. You usually know who would be good.
 - Be appreciative of the people who do work. If they feel needed, maybe they'll stay when their kids are done.
 - Promote people moving along up the ranks.
 - The 'years' prior to advancement (S&T -> Starter -> Referee) are guidelines, not rules.
 - Offer club trinkets (t-shirts, etc.) as incentives to officiate and advance.
 - Make pitch at Timer's meeting. You already know they're predisposed to being on deck.
 - Work with clubs to 'officiate a practice.'
 - *You do not have to be a USA member to shadow on deck! These people fall into the same category as the Timers as far as insurance liability goes.*

Personal Thoughts: Great ideas here.

Session – Coaches and Athlete Perspective

The session was focused on what the coaches and athletes expect from Officials. He also mentioned that coaches and officials are on the same team as they both want the athletes to succeed and do their best.

- Environment. Create an environment conducive for the athletes to succeed.
 - A welcoming environment. Coaches and athletes are guests and should be made to feel welcomed.
 - Organization. A well organized meet is best for all. Clarify roles, spaces, safety, etc.
 - Pace. The meet should move well without feeling hurried.
- Appropriate officiating for the level of meet (National, LSC, local, summer, etc.). This was clarified later as meaning that you CAN be more lenient (delay of meet, arms over the water in Fly) with the younger kids.
 - Lower levels – help kids fall in love with swimming. Convey the love of the sport.
 - Next level – Teaching and enforcing the fundamentals
- Measure DQ frequency from the beginning to the end of the meet for consistency. There was discussion on 'over officiating' here and what should be done if it occurs.
- Every kid has their own 'Olympic Moment.' Be there to help them succeed.
- Officials. Take care of yourselves and clubs should be wary of 'riding the best horses to death', meaning you don't want to burn people out. Pace yourself, be healthy and focused at meets.
- Give trust and respect to coaches/swimmers and it will be returned.
- We're not there to find out what coaches/swimmers are doing wrong.
- SAFETY – feet first entries, running on deck, equipment in the water when it shouldn't be, etc.
- Work with clubs to 'officiate a practice' so that officials, coaches, and swimmers can become comfortable with each other.

Personal Thoughts: This was great. I've tried out 'officiating a practice' with the Jets and it went very well. We had myself and two other experienced officials work with the younger kids. We had our uniforms on and it was great being able to observe and have a nice conversation about infractions in a relaxed, unhurried atmosphere and, I think, let the swimmers see that we weren't just old meanies out there to ruin their day. The coach really liked it as we were extra sets of eyes for her and she's looking forward to doing it again.

Session – Meet Referee

There was a lot of good stuff here and very helpful for myself as I'm shadowing for Referee right now. Some of the presentation was from the book, so I'm skipping those parts. Here are the highlights:

- To be successful:
 - Have a philosophy of leadership, a game plan, and a teacher first.
 - Make younger kids want to be at meets (announcer, music, fun for all!)
 - Keep priorities straight Make athlete centered decisions)
 - Preparation: Prior perfect planning presents performance. Be familiar with venue problems and deal with them.
 - Have leadership team. Mix old with new officials.
- Pre-Meet (Coaches and Officials) Meeting:

- Starting times
- Scratch procedures
- Swim-off procedures
- Juries appointed
- Water temperature
- Any unusual procedures (flyovers, chase, etc.)
- Be professional:
 - Calm, cool, collected
 - Courteous, kind, respectful
 - Lead quietly
 - Be pro-active (anticipate problems)
 - Be flexible (don't be afraid to make changes)
 - Be patient!
- Traps and pitfalls:
 - Ditch 'God' complex. Use resources available to you.
 - Be prepared to live with precedents at meet. Set good ones!
 - Involve all those affected by your decisions in your decisions. Use common sense.
 - Don't take over. Give responsibility and let them (other officials, etc.) do it.
 - Be open and honest, admit mistakes.
 - Give every issue a full hearing.
 - S&T Officials are the most important. It's where 'the rubber meets the road.'
 - Choose Chief Judge/team with care. It helps keep the team together and working well.
 - Walk the deck, talk to people, see how things are going.
- Juries: Coach, official, athlete, Meet Director. Make it an odd number (3-5) and have National/Geographic balance.

Session – Administrative Referee

Bringing order out of chaos! The primary responsibility is to ensure the creation of the meet 'Book', otherwise known as the official record of the meet.

- Communicate with Clerk of Course, Timing Equipment Operator, Timing Judge, and Computer Operator for issues (late touches, pad failures, etc.)
- Make sure these people (and yourself) have all of the needed supplies to perform their duties. This includes forms (DQ slips, Scratch forms, Name and Time Correction forms, etc.)
- Head to Staples or Office Max for office supplies (stapler/staples, paper clip, folders, pens/pencils, etc.)

This position takes a lot of practice and organization, but should be done at the LSC/local level.

Personal Thoughts: This presentation was mind boggling. There is so much to be done by the Administrative Referee and they must be knowledgeable of swimming rules and procedures, timing systems, etc.

Session – Underwater Replay

A very cool presentation on a system that was tried out at the 2008 USA Olympic Time Trials. The system would be used to confirm or overrule calls made on deck. The system would not be used to make calls not made from the deck. Carol explained how the system was set up and we watched a bunch of video of calls made and confirmed, made and overruled, and infractions that weren't called. On some of the video, it was a great reminder that water disturbance, shadow, etc. could mask infractions.

Session – Suit Inspections

Suggested suit observation tips:

- Avoid contact with the athlete (obviously no peeking).
- Observe the cut and the presence of fastening devices.
- Observe if the suit is made of textile material (no rubber or plastic).
- Allow coaches to help provide information.

Session – Organizing a Trials (Meet of Substance)

This was about the 208 Olympic Trials...

Philosophy:

- Best possible experience for swimmer.
- Technically perfect.
- Make it an event to remember.
- Special atmosphere.
- Engage the audience.

Vision:

- Big picture concept
- How to entertain yet respect technical aspects.
- Use of space and technology.
- Special effects – sound, light, etc.

Planning to implement the vision:

- Human Resources
- Physical space allocation (swimmer areas, officials rom, etc.)
- Budget
- Promotion
- Media
- Coaches
- Total Needs Package (the look, the flow, 'What if's?')
- Proper use of credentials for area access and movement into areas.
- Honorary Starters (8 great recognition opportunities)

Personal Thoughts: Nice but not really for Officials.

General Work Shop Observations

The sessions were very informative and I would certainly like to attend again in the future. One of the over-arching themes that I picked up was that an officials crew is a team and must work together to ensure a successful meet. There, also, were reoccurring mentions of thanking other officials and meet volunteers for their efforts as most meets couldn't be done without them.

Outside of the officiating realm, it was really neat to be able to talk with all sorts of different folks from LSC's all over the country; what swimming is like and how things are done there. I had lunch with a Referee from Maryland and she said that, when she was in Connecticut, her kids swam for a small team of about 300 kids. I just about hit the floor with her calling a 300 kid team 'small'!

Funniest thing heard (related by one of the presenters):

Quoting former swimmer Steve Lundquist on the downward dolphin kick in the breaststroke 'I don't see what the big deal is, I always through one in just before the touches!'