Apprentice Official Mentoring Guidelines and Suggestions

Stroke and Turn Apprentice

On deck mentoring of "apprentice" officials is an integral part of the development and certification of swimming officials within the Iowa LSC. Objectives of the certification program include providing the volunteer with the tools, knowledge and initial experience to enable them to confidently contribute to a consistent and fair environment on the pool deck for our athlete.

So why mentor? The purpose is to provide on-deck instruction and support in a non-threatening environment using the experience of the mentor to assist the development of the new official.

Mentor Requirements.

The basic requirement for an on-deck mentor is a minimum of 12 months on-deck experience as a certified official in the position being mentored. Additionally, the final apprentice session where the volunteer is to be recommended for certification requires that the mentor be a N2 or higher Stroke and Turn official.

Mentoring Approach.

Before starting a mentoring session – ensure the apprentice has the relevant apprentice sheet that you can sight so

(a) you know what the person has completed up till now, and

(b) you can enter in post-session comments and report immediately after the session.

Note: If the apprentice hasn't completed the Athlete Protection Training AND passed the USA Swimming required Back Ground Check, then you must accompany the apprentice on deck at all times (i.e. the apprentice cannot wander off by him or herself).

The apprentice learning experience is based on "shadowing" or following, an experienced official through pre-session activities, during a session and any post-session activities – which could end up being a very passive experience. To avoid this, active discussions should take place between the mentor and apprentice with questions asked by both participants to each other – and if the answer isn't known, don't make it up. Either look up the rules and regulations, or ask someone (either a chief judge if there is one or the Meet Referee). Remember – one of the principles of the program is to encourage consistency of approach and interpretations. Ensure that any open questions are resolved at the end of the session, or failing that, by following up with the Officials' Committee.

If this a the second or third session for the apprentice and radios are on deck, see if there is a radio available for the apprentice – this provides insight into the process of the infraction review and subsequent disqualification (or not).

Specific items to be covered during apprentice sessions include:

1. The officials briefing – please ensure the apprentice isn't distracted (or distracting) during the briefing. Ask after the meeting if the official has any questions.

2. For the first session – discuss the concept of jurisdiction to ensure the apprentice does understand what the different jurisdictions are for each position and, in particular, what are the requirements for the position(s) you will are assigned.
3. Have the apprentice stand within talking distance but not crowding your position. For each assigned position, ensure the apprentice understands what, where and when you are observing your jurisdiction. Be prepared to discuss the concepts of lead/lag, relief and reserve if these aren't being used at the meet.
    a. Don't use your hands to assist in explanations on deck (and especially don't point at a particular lane while talking to the apprentice on deck)
    b. Don't expect the apprentice to observe the same things that you do – you're not in the same position and your eyes aren't necessarily looking at the same area of the pool. However do discuss (privately) any infraction you observe and ask if the apprentice observed anything else.
    c. If walking stroke, have the apprentice walk behind you, then step back when you reach the end of the pool so you can walk past – discuss anything you saw quietly between heats, not during the swim. Also make sure the apprentice understands the concept of lead/lag.
    d. Have the apprentice review the DQ slip each session. Also have the apprentice complete a couple if you have any calls (for practice). Remember, the apprentice cannot make a call – so don't have them raise their hand.
    e. For backstroke – if you are observing for toes from the side of the pool, have the apprentice behind and to your side (but not interfering with the Starter). Ask a CJ or the Deck Referee where they would like the apprentice to be placed if observing for toes "over the top" (when using backstroke ledges.
    f. Provide the apprentice with a relay takeoff slip for any relay takeoffs and have them on the side looking in (behind and to the side of the RTO judge on that side). Review their slips and discuss any questions they may have. Don't have them mark the slips during takeoffs as some coaches may want to refer to them if there's an infraction, but provide one so the apprentice knows what they look like and how to fill them out.

After the session:

1. Make sure you talk with your apprentice and provide some feedback. Start with positive comments always and, then, if necessary, discuss areas for improvement, practice and/or concern.
2. Make sure you fill out the apprentice's sheet so that there is a record of the apprentice session. Check off the boxes for items that were performed during the session.
3. Include in comments any areas where you think the apprentice did well (there's not much room but still try to do this), plus any areas where you feel the apprentice would benefit with practice so the next mentor has an idea of where to start. This is important for all positions as there's a lot of different requirements for each position that the official should be competent in when certified.

Finally, make suggestions to the Meet Referee or directly to the Officials' Committee on how to improve the program and thank you for helping make this a better experience for our athletes and volunteers.