

# USA Swimming - Officials



## The Official - Athlete - Coach Relationship

Officials are an essential part of USA Swimming. They are a volunteer force that ensures equality for all athletes during competition. In an effort to improve the relationship between officials, athletes, and coaches, the athlete representatives on the USA Swimming Officials Committee have compiled this document to serve as a resource for members of USA Swimming.

## What every swimmer should know about DQ's

by Amy Ng



The most common disqualifications in swimming come during or at the beginning of a race, however many swimmers just accept that they have been disqualified and do not question the official. Did you know that you can ask the official that calls the disqualification to clarify what was done wrong and why it was illegal? The majority of swimmers are either afraid

to question their disqualification or do not think twice about finding out which movement, flinch, touch, etc. he or she did incorrectly.

As in any sport, officials, or judges are present in order to ensure fairness and equality in a race, meet, or event. Swimming penalties work very differently than other sports, especially team sports. The penalty for making a false start, incorrect movements, or illegal turns at any point during a race results in the disqualification of a swimmer from an event. The initial call is made by an official that is assigned to observe the swimmer's lane, but the disqualification must be confirmed by the referee.

In most cases swimmers are informed of the disqualification at the end of the race. When a swimmer is notified of his or her disqualification, he or she has the right to understand what has been done wrong. USA Swimming states in the rule book that when an official "makes a disqualification [he or she] shall make every reasonable effort to seek out the swimmer or his/her coach and inform him/her as to the reason for the disqualification." Swim-

mers have the right to know details about their disqualification. It is extremely important that swimmers recognize what they have done illegally, so that the disqualification does not occur again. A clear explanation is vital and if you do not understand something, be sure to ask the official or your coach. Regardless, swimmers should communicate with their coaches so that they do not make the same mistake twice!

Sometimes it seems like officials are there to punish swimmers and keep individuals from improving. Disqualifications occur in order to protect other swimmers and to educate those who violate any provision of the rule book. It is important to stress the value of an official's role on deck. Officials are present in order to keep races fair, and help swimmers and coaches improve and excel in the future. Officials and referees on deck at swim meets are there to help swimmers not work against them.

So in the future, at a meet, do not be afraid to approach an official for clarification or questions. If that official cannot help, another one will be able to. Always remember, officials are here for the swimmers, and are our friends not our enemies!

*Amy Ng is from San Ramon, CA. She swam competitively at SRVLA until college where she swam for UC Berkeley and Cal Aquatics.*

QuickTime™ and a TIFF (uncompressed) decompressor are needed to see this picture.

# The Athlete - Coach - Official Relationship

By Sarah Solfelt

Ideally, all swimmers should understand the officials' role before they enter their first competition, officials would always be able to locate and inform swimmers of their violations, and coaches would always be available to help swimmers understand the disqualification. However, as this is not always the case, the Officials Committee of USA Swimming has developed a fun solution as a mechanism to reinforce a positive relationship between athletes, coaches, and officials. Hosting a sanctioned intra-squad, dual, or tri-meet would be a great opportunity for young swimmers to develop a positive relationship with local officials. There are numerous possible formats for such an opportunity depending on specific club needs. Some suggestions not only for a learning meet, but also for a regular season meet are listed below.

## For Coaches

Prepare swimmers for competition by reinforcing legal elements of swimming at practice. Pay special attention at practices to turns, finishes, and kicks especially with developmental and novice swimmers. At team meetings or at meets, frame officials as a positive force in USA Swimming. Have materials available for swimmers and parents to explain how to swim legally. This newsletter would be a great resource for swimmers and parents. At swim meets, take the time to explain a swimmer's violation to reinforce the official's decision.



## For Officials

When approaching a swimmer at a meet, always bend over to talk at their level. Address the athlete by their first name. Introduce yourself. Try to speak in a calm and kind voice. Smile. Make every effort possible to move any unpleasant discussion between you and a coach or swimmer off the immediate pool deck. When off the deck, make sure that you have fun especially at developmental level swim meets. Your attitude directly impacts the overall feel of the meet. Your demeanor can help to make it an enjoyable experience for everybody.



## A Final Thought

I currently coach for the Aquajets Swim Team in Minnesota. Because we are primarily a developmental team, we try to host one or two learning meets during both the short course and the long course season. We have been blessed to welcome an outstanding official who kindly and patiently directs the overall flow of the meet and appropriately allots time for learning opportunities. Our coaching staff has found these experiences to be very helpful in reinforcing the things that we have taught in practice. We have also found that allowing our swimmers to interact with a fun and kind official has given them a positive perspective for future meets. If you decide to host a learning meet, be sure to provide a nice thank you gift for the official helping out. Remember, officials are volunteers who make swimming possible.

*Sarah Solfelt is from Eden Prairie, MN. She swam for the University of Minnesota and Minnesota Aquatics and currently coaches for the Aquajets Swim Team.*

# Important Questions and Answers

**Q: What does an official do?**



**A:** Officials help make sure that swim meets run smoothly and efficiently. To ensure fairness in a race, meet, or event, officials constantly observe swimmers and note disqualifications. They are most likely dressed in white and positioned around the pool deck. Officials are on deck to help swimmers learn from mistakes and help swimmers improve and excel in the future. They are volunteers who have gone through a series of certifications to be approved as an official on deck.

**Q: How do I know I got DQed?**



**A:** Officials are required to raise a hand when they see a swimmer violate a provision of the USA Swimming rule book. Most swimmers find out that they were disqualified after the race. Sometimes the swimmer will receive a DQ slip and an explanation from an official. Sometimes the coach will be notified if the official does not have the opportunity to talk with the swimmer. In the case of a false start, most disqualifications are communicated after the race although there may be an occasion where the false start is called prior to the start of the race. The official should explain what illegal movement you have made and clarify any questions.

**Q: What do I do after a DQ?**



**A:** Be sure to get a clear explanation of what has been done illegally in the race to make a disqualification an opportunity to fix any mistakes. Swimmers have the right to understand what the official observed. It is important to recognize what has been done illegally so that the disqualification does not occur twice. Swimmers should talk to their coach to correct their mistakes in practice. Remember, officials are there to help. They are always available to clarify questions or explain a disqualification.