

What Do I Do If an Official is Making Too Many Calls or Missing Obvious Calls?

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As a deck referee, you may be very limited in what to do at a local meet because you are confined to a particular area with the starter. However, you have a few options depending on the situation. With no relief official and not using headsets you must look at the DQ slips very carefully and see what the calls are. If it is the same call on every swimmer, when that official rotates into your quadrant you can watch the strokes to see what the official is watching and you are now in a position to overcall, deny or verify the official. If the official is working more than one session plan to eat lunch with the official so you can spend time talking swimming and stroke and evaluate the official. This is a wonderful opportunity to do mentoring.

If you realize the official is making calls that are not correct, find a way to talk to the official without embarrassing him/her and talk about the correct stroke with the official. If the officials are not rotating, but you have relief officials, ask the relief official to exchange with that particular official and then ask the official to come to you so you can evaluate and educate the official without embarrassing them. This is almost like a private clinic, but the official will appreciate that you are willing to make sure they are comfortable with the strokes. More often than not it is a misinterpretation of the pre-meet clinic presentation. Some officials do not want to ask questions in the pre-meet meeting because of the time frame. This can easily be remedied with a one-on-one talk during the session.

If you are a chief judge at a larger meet you can position yourself where you can watch an official for whom you have a concern. Once, at a National Championship meet, I was faced with this type of situation and I positioned myself at the turn end of the pool so I could see that the official was not making a call. I asked the official what they were watching. The answer I received was they were watching the head, then the hands on the turn, and then looking at the feet. I suggested they might want to look at the whole body and if something were awry they would notice it immediately and then make the call. In doing this the official was so surprised because his LSC had taught him to look first at the head and hands and then at the legs. When the official realized that he could really see an alternating kick by looking at the whole body during a turn on the butterfly they were so surprised.

My next question to the official was did you raise your hand? The official said no. If they do not raise a hand then it is a no call. This official appreciated how he was treated. He was not criticized, nor ridiculed nor embarrassed. He learned how to look at the total swimmer. The official, who is now one of our well-known referees, often tells this story at clinics. As a chief judge you are the best mentor at a swim meet. You are responsible for placing the officials at the swim meet. It is your responsibility to place the strongest officials in the most critical position and the less experienced officials in a position where they can learn by watching the other officials and asking questions.

You may have a situation where one of the stroke & turn judges is significantly more experienced than the others on deck and is making good calls while everyone else is missing some. This situation will likely occur at your developmental meets as the judges are new to the sport as are their children. It is not practical to move everyone else off the deck so in order to try to keep an even playing field, you might want to take the experienced judge and make him or her a chief judge. In that way you have another set of eyes and ears to deal with the calls that do happen and to work with the inexperienced judges to help them become better at their jobs.

If you run into the situation where an official is just not competent enough to be making calls, you need to get that person another job on the deck. You could try to find something where an extra hand would be useful, perhaps as head timer or some other position where that person's capabilities can be beneficial to the meet.

You should always try to make sure you understand the capabilities and experience of your officials. If you have officials with whom you are unfamiliar, make it a point to spend time with them so you will get to know them and then can be totally fair in how you staff the deck.