

Chief Judge Clinic – Feb 7, 2026



Presenters

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Clinic Objectives

- Shift mindset from Stroke & Turn to Chief Judge leadership
- Clarify CJ responsibilities before, during, and after sessions
- Understand how CJ actions affect the entire meet
- Build confidence managing people and information
- Reinforce national and LSC CJ philosophy
- Provide tools you can immediately apply on deck

Chief Judge Philosophy

- The CJ team succeeds or fails together
- Chief Judges set the emotional tone of the deck
- Calm leadership stabilizes the meet environment
- Officials take cues from CJ behavior and demeanor
- Problems are handled quietly and professionally
- Consistency builds trust with officials and referees
- There is no place for ego or drama on the CJ team
- Always remain flexible.

The Role of the Chief Judge

- Primary mentor and support resource for Stroke & Turn officials
- Key communication link between deck officials and referees
- Responsible for managing information flow on deck
- Ensures consistent application of meet protocols
- Anticipates and resolves issues before escalation
- Supports referees by filtering and clarifying information
- Focused on people and process, not making calls

CJ Role by Meet Level

- LSC meets may be informal but still require leadership
- Sectionals and Zones use dedicated CJ teams
- Futures, Juniors, and Nationals follow national-deck protocols
- Preparation increases as meet level increases
- Communication expectations increase with meet level
- CJ visibility and coordination become more critical
- Fundamental CJ responsibilities remain the same

Preparation Before the Meet

- Understand your assignment and session expectations
- Review meet-specific protocols and jurisdictions
- Know radio procedures and approved terminology
- Understand the chain of command before issues arise
- Arrive informed about meet layout and logistics
- Preparation reduces stress and on-deck confusion
- Well-prepared CJs allow referees to focus on racing

Arrival on Deck

- Arrive early to establish presence and awareness
- Check in with Meet Referee, Deck Referee, or Team Lead CJ
- Confirm radios are charged, distributed, and functional
- Locate paperwork, equipment, and official positions
- Identify any unusual deck conditions
- Address questions before the session begins
- Set a calm, confident tone immediately

Pre-Session Responsibilities

- Ensure officials have signed in and credentials verified
- Distribute radios and conduct a complete radio check
- Prepare DQ slips, relay forms, and other paperwork
 - Deck sets to MR, DR, CJs and anyone else who needs one
 - Referee, SR, OOF paperwork (prior to the session start in consultation with the admin team)
- Confirm officials are in assigned positions
- Answer last-minute questions from officials
- Communicate any concerns to leadership
- Ensure the deck is ready before the first start

Officials Briefing – Setting the Tone

- Review anything with the deck set you need to
- Briefings should be calm, organized, and professional
- Set expectations clearly without overloading information
- Focus on what officials need to know for success
- Officials should leave confident and prepared
- Tone should be supportive, not authoritative
- Confidence without intimidation builds trust
- Your demeanor defines the deck culture

Officials Briefing – Content

- Review stroke (likely only one per meet) and jurisdiction expectations
- Explain meet-specific deck protocols
- Highlight unusual events or special considerations
- Review relay and long-distance procedures if applicable
- Introduce meet leadership and chain of command
- Clarify who officials should go to with questions
- Confirm understanding before leaving the briefing
- Invite officials that need clarification to meet after the regular meeting

During the Session – CJ Focus

- Watch officials rather than swimmers
- Maintain awareness of the entire pool and deck
- Look for raised hands and non-verbal cues
- Anticipate coverage needs and transitions
- Be visible but not intrusive
- Support officials in real time
- Manage multiple responsibilities calmly

The CJ Dance

- Continuously scan the deck and pool
- Shift positions quietly to support teammates
- Fill coverage gaps when others are occupied
- Coordinate movements without verbal disruption
- Avoid drawing attention to adjustments
- Operate as a seamless, unified team
- Situational awareness is critical to success

Responding to a Raised Hand

- Acknowledge the official promptly and professionally
- Begin radio awareness for deck leadership by communicating a possible infraction (then radio area of the pool and official's jurisdiction that in so DR and CJ team are aware. Eg. Possible disqualification turn-end lanes 1-4)
- Move efficiently without urgency or alarm
- Determine what lane of possible infraction (then radio that in so DR and CJ team are aware. Eg. lane 4)
- Create space for the official to explain
- Ensure the official feels supported
- Prepare to vet the observation

Vetting a Potential Call

- Ask the official what they observed
- Anticipate any questions the DR might have; be ready to paint a picture (a polaroid, not a Rembrandt) of what was observed.
- Do not offer the description of the call unless asked. If the DR has follow-up questions, then you can paint the fuller picture.
- Clarify what was different from legal expectations
- Confirm where and when the observation occurred
- Ensure the observation describes an illegal action
- Avoid discussing swimmer intent
- Take time to fully understand the call
- Vet calmly even under time pressure

What Not to Do When Vetting

- Do not lead the official toward a conclusion
- Do not teach rules or mechanics on deck
- Do not debate or argue with the official
- Do not rush due to external pressure
- Do not undermine the official publicly
- Do not let frustration show
- Do not skip clarification steps

Communicating the Call

- Use clear, concise, and factual language
- Follow established radio phrasing
 - Call the event, heat, lane, and the infraction. Eg. Possible disqualification event 26, heat 3, lane 4. One hand touch at turn 1, “Recommend accept”)
- Provide only essential information
- Be prepared to answer follow-up questions
- Paint a clear but brief picture
- Avoid speculation or embellishment
- Maintain a calm, professional tone

CJ Recommendations

- “Recommend accept” when observation supports a violation
- "Recommend further discussion" when clarification is needed
- Support no-call outcomes when appropriate
- Respect the referee’s final decision
 - Accept a call, Not accept a call, or Ask for further discussion
- Support officials regardless of outcome
- Move forward without revisiting the call

Radio Communication Best Practices

- Speak calmly and at a steady pace
- Use event, heat, and lane consistently
- Avoid unnecessary or emotional radio traffic
- Allow others to finish before speaking
- Pause before transmitting; This allow the radio to start broadcasting
- Always keep radios communication professional
- Remember radios also set the tone for the deck

Writing DQ Slips – Why It Matters

- Provides an accurate meet record
- Protects officials and swimmers
- Supports referee decisions
- Aids in protest resolution
- Reflects officiating professionalism
- Incomplete paperwork creates issues
- Accuracy matters more than speed

Writing DQ Slips – Key Elements

- Event, heat, and lane clearly written
- Swimmer name and team legible
- Correct infraction and swim phase
- Proper signatures obtained
- No extraneous commentary
- Delivered promptly to referee
- Retain notes on heat sheet as required
- Don't write DQ slips on other slips
- Double check the accuracy of the slip (including carbon copy yellow)

Swimmer Notification

- One of the CJ's highest priorities
- Clear, respectful, and calm communication
- Avoid technical language or debate
- Ensure swimmer understands what occurred
- Do not argue or justify the call
- Advocate for swimmer clarity
- Notify referee once complete
- If the Disqualification has not been accepted by the Referee in a timely manner, inform the swimmer that there may be an issue with their swim and check in with your coach.

When a Call Is Not Accepted

- Support the official privately
- Explain the decision calmly
- Avoid assigning blame
- Use as a learning opportunity
- Reinforce confidence and trust
- Do not revisit the call publicly
- Move forward as a team

Caring for Your Officials

- Ensure access to water, breaks, and chairs
- Communicate schedules and expectations
- Be aware of physical fatigue
- Monitor mental focus and stress
- Express appreciation regularly
- Advocate for officials when needed
- Supported officials perform better

Mentoring on Deck

- Observe positioning and mechanics
- Offer guidance privately
- Focus on polish and consistency
- Tailor feedback to the individual
- Use positive reinforcement
- Correct issues early when possible
- Build confidence through support

Common CJ Mistakes

- Acting as a Stroke & Turn official
- Over-vetting due to uncertainty
- Under-vetting due to time pressure
- Poor radio discipline or tone
- Correcting officials publicly
- Skipping the chain of command
- Forgetting that people management is the job

Chain of Command

- Meet Referee has overall authority
- Team Lead Chief Judge coordinates CJ operations
- Deck Referee manages deck execution
- Follow the chain to ensure consistency
- Proper channels protect everyone
- Escalate issues appropriately
- Respect leadership roles

Post-Session Responsibilities

- Thank officials and release them properly
- Collect radios, paperwork, and equipment
- Organize materials for next session
- Assist with debriefs or evaluations if requested
- Communicate issues to leadership
- Reset deck expectations if needed
- Leave the deck prepared for the next session

Discussion: Stepping Into the CJ Role

- What feels most challenging about being a CJ?
- What concerns do you have about leading peers?
- What support would help you succeed?
- What CJ behaviors have you admired?
- What mistakes are you worried about making?
- How can the CJ team support each other?
- Open discussion and shared experience

Key Takeaways

- Chief Judging is leadership, not authority
- Preparation prevents problems
- Calm communication keeps meets running smoothly
- People management is the core CJ job
- Strong teams create successful meets
- Confidence grows with experience
- Your role matters on every deck

CJ Language Guide – Swimmer Notification

- Purpose: provide clear, calm, respectful notification after a DQ is accepted
- Notification is not a debate or explanation of rules
- Identify yourself and state the outcome briefly
- Redirect detailed questions to the coach
- Acknowledge emotion without validating or disputing the call
- End the interaction promptly and professionally
- Notify the referee once swimmer notification is complete
- Mark yes/no in swimmer notified section of the disqualification slip.

CJ Language Guide – Supporting Officials After a No-Call

- Support the official immediately and privately
- Thank the official for raising their hand
- Reinforce that good process matters more than outcome
- Explain the referee decision calmly without blame
- Offer one specific learning point when appropriate
- Protect the official’s confidence and credibility
- Help the official mentally reset for the next race

CJ Scenarios for Discussion



Scenario 1: Borderline Call, Experienced Official

- An experienced Stroke & Turn official raises their hand on a borderline observation
- The official is confident but acknowledges it was close
- The referee ultimately does not accept the call
- The official appears frustrated and quiet afterward

Scenario 2: New Official, Clear Observation

- A newer Stroke & Turn official raises their hand on a clear violation
- The official struggles to clearly describe what they observed
- The referee asks for clarification over the radio
- The official becomes nervous during the exchange

Scenario 3: Multiple Raised Hands

- Two officials raise their hands on the turn end during the same event
- Multiple CJs respond to the calls and are speaking on radio at the same time
- Radio traffic becomes congested
- The referee is waiting for clear information

Scenario 4: Emotional Swimmer Notification

- A swimmer becomes visibly upset during notification
- The swimmer asks detailed rule questions
- A coach begins approaching during the interaction
- Other swimmers are nearby and listening

Scenario 5: Fatigue Late in the Session

- The session is running long and officials appear tired
- Coverage gaps begin to appear on deck
- Radio responses are delayed or incomplete
- Officials are less confident raising hands

Resources

- Certification Requirements
 - Certified Stroke & Turn Judge, and worked 16 or more sessions as a certified Stroke and Turn
 - Attend a CJ clinic or briefing of CJ Duties and read the CJ Professional Document
 - Apprentice as a CJ 4 training sessions at a minimum of 2 meets with a trainer(s)
 - [Chief Judge Certification Template \(Details\)](#)
- [The Professional CJ Judge](#)

Who to Contact After the Clinic

- Derigan Silver — Officials Committee Chair
Email: officialschair@swimcolorado.org
- Todd Yee — Officials Coordinator
Email: officialscoordinator@swimcolorado.org
- Jason Slavik — Zone 1 Representative
Email: officialsrep1@swimcolorado.org
- Cheryl Hampton — Zone 2 Representative
Email: officialsrep2@swimcolorado.org
- Chris Synsvoll — Zone 3 / 5 Representative
Email: officialsrep5@swimcolorado.org
- Katie McManus — Zone 4 Representative
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Questions

