

STROKE & TURN POINTS OF ATTENTION

... Or, as one Meet Referee once put it in a pre-meet clinic, "my favorite pet peeves."

(NOTE TO THE READER: the following points have been gleaned from pre-meet clinics at various championship meets in my LSC, and seem to me like "best practices" worth adopting at any meet. I like to see these things written down for reference, thus this working compilation. **HOWEVER**, you should always follow the instructions of your Meet Referee, and the rule book, if they conflict with anything found here.)

1. Incomplete, illegible, or incorrect DQ slips – things we all forget sometimes

- **Mark slips boldly.** Circling items, rather than just ticking them, often helps.
- **Sign/write your name legibly.** Pre-sign some slips if you sometimes forget to sign, or if it takes too much time during a race. If the judge making a call can't be identified, **there is no call.**
- Be sure to circle **Start, Swim, Turn, and/or Finish** under the correct stroke.
- Remember: transitions from one stroke to the next during IM/Medley events are **finishes and starts, not turns!**
- Remember to write infraction number(s) in the **IM section for IM events.**
- **Write in the swimmer's name** (and club above to right) if at all possible. Use timer sheets, heat sheets, scoreboard, etc. as sources, keeping in mind that the scoreboard can sometimes be wrong.
- **Track event and heat numbers yourself**, on program, heat sheets, scrap paper, etc., in case the scoreboard, announcer, etc. is wrong (it happens!).
- **Double-check for correct event, heat, and lane number** (watch out for "lane reversal syndrome" when rotating between opposite ends of the pool!)
- **Write in additional information** to help the Referee, Coach, and swimmer fully understand what you saw. Not all infractions apply to all parts of the race! For example, Breaststroke: turn: kick: butterfly: this may or may not be legal, depending on the timing and number of the kick(s) - add this information (briefly) next to the infraction or in the "other" blank. Backstroke: turn: past vertical during turn: non-continuous turning action: what was non-continuous? (flotation before/after/without pull? sculled back to touch?)
- **Try to record which turn(s) were involved in turn infractions.** In the "Turn" blank, write #1, #3, #5, etc. (if at turn end), or #2, #4, etc. (if at start end). For swim infractions, recording which length (i.e., "2nd length, start end") is helpful. This also helps maintain your awareness of the race and the swimmers.
- **Mark bottom of slip** to reflect communication (or lack thereof) with swimmer/coach.
 - ✓ **Tip: before each meet**, after you re-read the stroke rules, **also read the DQ slip!** This reduces the time you have to spend hunting for the right blank during a race. This also helps you remember which infractions are in the "other" categories, such as hands past hips during breaststroke swim, (re-)submerged during swim (past 15 m) in butterfly or freestyle, springing from bottom, etc.
 - ✓ **Tip: there are 3 separate past-vertical choices for backstroke** on the DQ slip! Find them and be familiar with the correct uses for each. **Independent kicks are no longer relevant in the backstroke rules, and should never be marked.**

- ✓ **Tip: make brief notes** (heat, lane, violation, turn/length #, jurisdiction) of calls made **on your program or heat sheet** to help you remember the circumstances should they need to be recalled or verified later.

2. Inattention or leaving jurisdiction early (all in fairness to the athletes)

- **Always maintain fair and even coverage** by giving the swimmers your **undivided attention** while in your jurisdiction. Unless you have relief, don't become distracted by a DQ slip, program, coach, athlete, timer, etc., while any swimmer is in your jurisdiction (unless it is a matter of safety).
 - ✓ **Tip:** initially record only **lane** and **infraction**. Add heat, event, swimmer name, other blanks, etc., while jurisdiction is empty. If you don't have relief, it's better to spend the next two heats finishing the slip correctly while maintaining fair coverage, than to turn in an incomplete/incorrect slip or give uneven coverage to the swimmers or heats.
- **Do not leave your jurisdiction until the last swimmer has left it for the final time in that heat.** When trying to reach a DQed swimmer from the turn end, **do not leave in the middle of your heat.** If relief offers to step in sooner, politely decline and indicate that you will finish this heat first [unless instructed otherwise]. Likewise, when returning, do not relieve a "stand-in" until their heat is complete. Each heat must receive fair and uniform coverage. When no relief is available, you may not have time to reach the swimmer from the turn end, in which case just get the DQ slip to your Deck Referee ASAP.
 - ✓ **Tip:** If discussing an infraction with a swimmer and relief is not available, try asking them (and **only** them) to stand with you while you are watching the next heat. Complete and hand them their copy only while no swimmers are in your jurisdiction. If the swimmer chooses to leave before you are finished, that's ok, they have other priorities, and you did your best while maintaining fair and uniform conditions of competition.
 - ✓ **NOTE:** some Referees prefer that you reach each disqualified swimmer personally, even if you have no relief and must leave your jurisdiction unwatched for part or all of a heat. To me, this has always seemed grossly unfair to the swimmer being disqualified, since the several unwatched fellow competitors are thereby not being held to the same standard of observance of the rules. Again, however, the instructions of your Referee must prevail.

3. Position, position, position! (all in fairness to the athletes)

- **Come all the way forward to the pool edge** while swimmers are in your jurisdiction. This ensures proper position for observing touches and turns. (Yes, you **will** get wet!)
- **Don't be a statue!** To properly observe different parts of a swim often requires different perspectives. To equitably observe all swimmers in your jurisdiction (unless it covers only 1 or 2 lanes) requires that you observe each from the same perspectives, for roughly the same amounts of time, during the race, insofar as possible. **Move around!** (Calmly and slowly, not frantically, and with obstacles and safety first in mind)
- **Slowly walk over each lane** during each swimmer's turn or finish, if swimmer spacing allows. If it does not, move to different sides and/or lanes of your jurisdiction for each lap, in such a manner that each swimmer receives the most equal coverage possible. (**Example:** 4 lanes swimming 8 lengths, alternate standing between lanes 1-2 and lanes 3-4, watching all 4 lanes from each position each time. Do not park between lanes 2-3 for the entire race, and thereby give those lanes different coverage than 1 and 4.)

- **Freestyle is not rest time for officials!** [again, some Meet Referees disagree.] Watching an entire heat of 1650 freestyle parked in a chair at one corner of the pool is **grossly unfair** to the nearest swimmers, for whom you are much more likely to observe a missed touch (never to be inferred from lack of push-off!). When watching an entire heat yourself, try to cover the lanes as evenly and consistently as possible. **Some suggestions:** for 500s and above, after watching the first turn from between the nearest pair of lanes, **move between the next pairs of lanes on successive turns** until you reach the farthest pair. If the race is long enough, after **two** turns between the farthest pair, reverse the process back to the first pair, and so on. For shorter races, move an appropriate number of lanes between each turn so that you move evenly from one side of the course to the other, then reverse the process for the next heat. For 2-length races, alternate heats standing between the 2nd and 3rd lanes from each side of the course and try to watch all lanes – when alone, that may be the best you can do.
- **None of the above should change for empty lanes.** Give every lane in your jurisdiction an equal amount of attention in every heat, even the empty ones. A swimmer with the misfortune of being in a small heat should not incur the additional misfortune of being over-judged relative to fellow competitors in full heats.
- When an entire heat occupies the same or fewer number of adjacent lanes as for a single normal jurisdiction, only one end judge (turn or stroke/turn) should watch that heat, and that judge should watch the lanes as if his/her jurisdiction was full. (**Examples:** 8-lane pool, 2 stroke/turn judges at each end, swimmers in lanes 3, 4, and 5 (or 3, 4, and 6), one judge at each end steps back, and the other judge watches those 3 lanes plus a 4th empty lane. Or in the same situation, except with swimmers in 1, 2, 3, and 5, both judges should watch their regular jurisdictions and give equal attention to all lanes.) Side judges, if any, must continue to watch their assigned jurisdictions normally to maintain fairness.

4. Miscellaneous Deck Demeanor

- **Maintain a professional appearance, with full attention on the swimmers in your jurisdiction.** Try to keep hands free and out from in front of you (except when writing DQs or notes) to minimize distraction. (It helps to use a writing surface small enough to tuck behind your waist, or to otherwise be unobtrusive.)
- **Step forward to the pool edge while swimmers are in your jurisdiction; step back when they leave again.** (This reassures coaches, swimmers, officials, and parents that you are paying attention and not judging beyond your jurisdiction.) **For the start, step back between the timers, or to the side of the starting area,** so as not to obstruct the timers' view or distract the Starter or swimmers. **Immediately after the start, quickly but calmly step forward** to observe your jurisdiction (with obstacles and safety first in mind).
- **Do not rush around, bending and squinting at swimmers.** Your demeanor helps set the tone of the entire meet. You are there to calmly and confidently observe compliance with the rules, **not to scrutinize** for any possible infraction. **Look for reasons not to DQ, instead of looking for reasons to raise your hand.** If you know and remember to observe **all** the rules, and learn to **observe the whole swimmer** and not focus on

particular parts, you will see valid infractions when they occur, and your hand will go up without hesitation (but still calmly!).

- **Raise your hand prominently.** [You may be instructed to leave it up until a Chief Judge sees it; otherwise put it back down after about 5 seconds.] If you do not raise your hand, or your raised hand is not visible, then there is no valid call. If you realize a few seconds or minutes later that what you saw really wasn't a violation, or that you were not sure of what you saw, you can always choose not to write or turn in the slip (or to retrieve it if already turned in).
- **Do not wait to stand over an offending lane before putting up your hand.** This is unnecessary, and distracts from even coverage of your jurisdiction. **Your hand should go up as soon as you observe an infraction, wherever you are standing.** The direction of your gaze will indicate where the infraction occurred. Continue observing all lanes equally during the entire DQ process.
- **Don't worry about the reaction of swimmers,** or others standing on deck, to your raised hand. Coaches should tell their swimmers not to worry – it may not be them, and if it is, it could still be retracted or overturned; they should continue their race as if it will be. Parents and coaches on deck should know better.
- **If someone asks about your call,** and you haven't been instructed otherwise, feel free to politely explain as much as you are able to without becoming distracted. [At some meets you may be asked to speak only with a Chief Judge or Referee.] **If someone questions or disputes your call,** you could respond sympathetically by saying that *"if I made a mistake, I definitely want it to be corrected, and the only person allowed to make that decision is the Referee. Please have your Coach discuss it with the Referee as soon as possible."* Then move on; the discussion is over. **Considering protests is not within your jurisdiction. If the dispute persists, seek relief and move the discussion off deck, preferably in the direction of the Meet Referee.** You are no good to the competition when distracted by someone arguing with you.
- If you are watching more than 1 or 2 lanes, and unless you are in a training situation, do not be overly concerned if another official or bystander says that you missed a call, or asks if you saw that infraction. Smile. If you did see it, and didn't realize it was an infraction at the time, admit your mistake and offer thanks for the learning opportunity. Otherwise, good responses can be *"thanks, it looked good from my angle,"* or *"oh well, I must have been watching another lane at the time."* No one else sees the race from your perspective unless they are standing right next to you, and no one else can second-guess you unless you were staring right at a blatant infraction. Any official should know better; they've been there too. **Do,** however, take it as an opportunity for self-evaluation: are you observing **all** the swimmers and **all** the rules in the fairest possible manner?
- Likewise, **if you realize later that you made an incorrect call,** or were not really certain of the call, put ego aside, admit the mistake, and timely retract the call or get it withdrawn by the Referee. If you haven't given the slip to anyone yet, just pocket it.
- **Expect calls to be overturned, and don't take it personally.** Meet officials work as a team; each has their own job to do, and egos can only get in the way. When a call is questioned, the Meet Referee's job is to consider all the information from the Judge ("the

three questions”), and the Coach when applicable, and make the fairest possible decision for the athletes based on the rules and any extenuating circumstances. If that results in your call being overturned, don’t worry about it: you still did your job, the Referee did theirs, and the process worked for the athletes, which is why we are all there. If there was an error on your part, welcome it as a learning experience. All officials make mistakes at all stages of experience. Move on and keep working.

5. Review Training Materials Frequently! Experienced judges know that they need constant review and practice. The following, all available at www.usaswimming.org under Volunteers, Officials, Training Resources or Rules & Regulations, are very helpful before meets:

- USA Swimming Rules & Regulations book (technical sections)
- Interpretations by the Rules & Regulations Committee
- DQ Slip (makes it easier to navigate during competition)
- Situations and Resolutions
- Current Training Video
- Mental Traps in swim officiating (toward end of Chapter 5, Guide to Officiating Swimming)
- "Good Intentions" - an article by a coach under Articles and Presentations
- 10 Points of self-evaluation

6. The Golden Rule of Swimming Officiating:

Fairness to all competitors, giving the benefit of the doubt, in every instance, to the swimmer.

- Benefit of the doubt: ***only* call what you see** (never infer what you don’t see).
- Fairness to all competitors: ***always* call what you see** (pay attention, know the rules).
- Benefit of the doubt ***and*** fairness to all competitors: ***both are equally important.***
- **Observe** athletes for compliance with the rules; **don’t scrutinize** for a reason to DQ. (A need for scrutiny implies the existence of doubt.)

7. The best compliment an official can receive after a long day’s work:

“... and what did you do at the meet?”