

GUIDE TO OFFICIATING

CHAPTER 5 - STROKE & TURN, RELAY TAKE-OFF JUDGE

V. A Philosophy of Stroke/Turn/Relay Take-off Officiating: Mental Traps

It is not very difficult to acquire the technical knowledge required to judge the strokes and turns or finishes. A judge will gain that knowledge and become proficient with practice. The challenge, however, is to apply that knowledge **professionally**. Whether we recognize it or not, all of us, as human beings, are influenced by a wide variety of factors when we try to make judgments. We have this marvelous thing called a brain, which allows us to apply "reason" whenever we make judgments. Yet, when using this capacity, we have to be careful not to apply human reason in such a way that it causes us to make poor or "sloppy" judgments. Over the years, various examples of this, often stemming from well intentioned but misguided rationale, have surfaced. Some examples of the "mental traps" that have surfaced in stroke and turn officiating over the years are:

1. Advantage vs. disadvantage (as a basis for making a judgment)?

The question of whether swimmer advantage / disadvantage should influence the official judgment of stroke, turn and finish violations has been the subject of much debate. Some authorities have used the term, "unfair advantage," in decisions relating to specific situations. Unfortunately, this has also caused considerable apprehension and/or misinterpretation about the intent of this phrase. There is no intent that this concept be applied broadly to all situations, thus justifying inaction by officials in not calling violations such as missed turns, touches, etc., because "no advantage was gained." This type of negative interpretation only leads to "sloppy" officiating and, unfortunately, gives an official an excuse for inadequate performance. Obviously, "unfair advantage" may be used to explain one reason why an action is an infraction. Still, a violation of the rules should be noted and the competitor disqualified whether an advantage is gained or not. Therefore, caution should be exercised in any application of this rationale, to preclude its use as a "crutch" for poor officiating.

2. The "Twice Theory."

Some judges feel they should wait until an infraction happens more than once before they call it. They rationalize this position in all sorts of ways (e.g., "That clears up any doubt." "That confirms that it wasn't a simple mistake by the swimmer." etc.) Frankly, all of these, again, are crutches and excuses for uncertain and poor officiating. There is no basis for waiting to see an infraction happen twice and, in fact, it often won't. The official must simply be certain of what he saw and make the call as soon as it is observed. If there is any doubt about the violation, then don't make the call! (Remember, the swimmer gets the benefit of any doubt.) But, by the same token, don't then concentrate on that one swimmer to see if he commits the suspected infraction again. Continue to give all the competitors uniform coverage in observing their performance.

3. "We don't disqualify 8 & Unders" (the age group may change to 10 & Unders).

People who take this position often rationalize it by saying they don't want to cause "mental trauma" to a youngster. They usually go on to say they have no problems "socking it to a 13 & Older." While this may sound good, it is grounded in some clearly erroneous and extraneous beliefs. First, it views the judge's role as punitive. That's completely wrong. Rather, a disqualification should be viewed as a) "protecting the other athletes" in the competition, and b) "educating" the athlete who commits the infraction so he/she won't do it again. Secondly, it assumes that everyone in the identified age group is a "beginner" while those in the older age groups are "experienced" and, therefore, should be held to



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a stricter standard. Yet, this is also often erroneous. Athletes enter the sport at various ages and some 8 & Unders (having competed for a year or more) are far more "experienced" than some teenagers who are just entering the sport. In any event, experience is irrelevant. Finally, the idea that disqualifying an 8 & Under will "traumatize the child's psyche" is ludicrous. It clearly ignores the fact that youngsters are constantly being corrected during their early, formative years; that's how they learn.

4. "Don't ask me to judge my child."

Advocates of this usually fall into one of two categories. First, "I don't want anyone to think my child got by with some infraction because I was judging." Second, "I don't want to have to explain to my child why he/she was disqualified." Yet, this goes to the central element of being a "professional" judge. The Referee must know that the judge treats everyone in the field the same - "fairly and equitably." - all the time. The Referee must be confident that a judge will identify an infraction regardless of the effect upon his child, his team (club), his LSC. This is probably the ultimate test of the judge's impartiality, and referees should not let judges "off the hook" on this basis. To the judge, this is the time when he must separate himself from his parental role and accept the responsibility of being a USA Swimming judge.

5. Don't Infer (Extrapolate)

Succinctly put, this simply means: you can only call what you see, NOT what you deduct. You must actually see the swimmer miss the wall with his right hand on the turn, not assume he missed it because, by the time you looked, he was touching the wall with his left hand and was already turning. You must actually see the breaststroker take the second arm pull and be past the widest part of that second stroke before his head surfaces, not assume that it took two pulls to get that far out in the pool when you saw his head surface. Another way of putting this: don't look for reasons to disqualify. If you see the infraction and it is clear, report it, but if you are uncertain, remember that the benefit of any doubt must go to the athlete.

Conduct:

1. No outward manifestations during a race regarding illegality of competitor except raised hand.
2. Do not cheer, coach or swap disqualifications; control your emotions.
3. Do not fraternize with swimmers, coaches or spectators; disregard club affiliation and personal relationships.
4. Do not concentrate on frequent violators to the exclusion of others.
5. Give undivided attention -- start to finish.
6. If uncertain of role, consult with the Referee.

