

2016 Open Water Clinic Report

Ft. Myers, FL

April 7th – 10th, 2016

The 2016 Open Water Clinic, hosted by USA Swimming in Ft. Myers, FL, spanned four days, with the first day spent in a Clinic setting and the following three days spent officiating and observing at the competition site of Miramar Lakes.

Day 1 (Thursday, 4/7)

Thursday was an all-day Open Water Clinic presented by Sandy Drake (Hawaiian Swimming). The clinic was predominantly about athlete safety and the procedures and processes used to ensure safety. There was, really, only minimal coverage was given of actual violations (which was odd to this pool boy!). We had a surprise guest during the afternoon when Haley Anderson (Olympic 10k Silver medalist in London) and her coach stopped in to speak and answer questions for about 20 minutes. The highlight of that was Haley telling us that she smears gobs of Vaseline all over her lower legs and feet to prevent other swimmers from grasping and holding on to her. Apparently, OW swimming is a full contact sport! I was able to get all of the training and OW event materials that Sandy had and will make them available on the Niagara website. That evening, we all attended the 10k Technical Meeting.

Day 2 (Friday, 4/8)

Day 2 was spent at the competition site for the Men's and Women's 10k National Championship events.

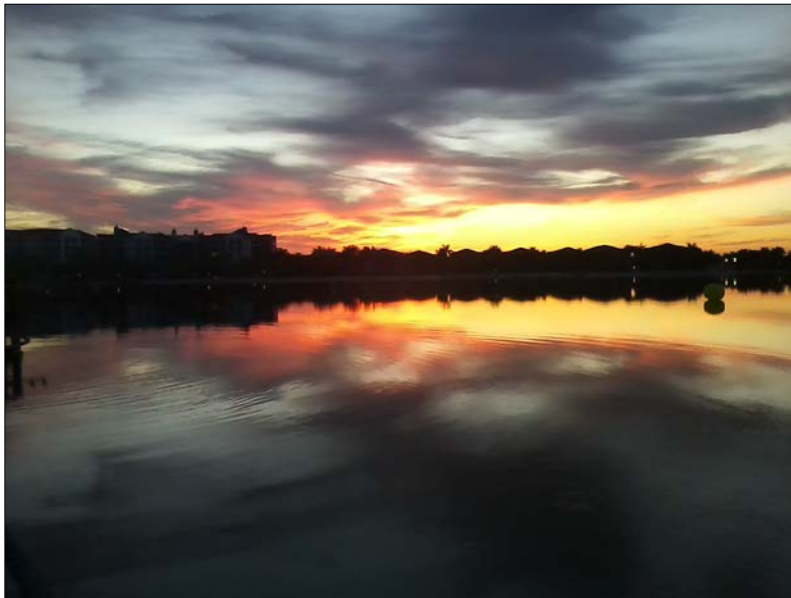


Figure 1 Sunrise on Day 1 at Miramar Lakes

This year, USA Swimming allowed international swimmers into the event and several countries used this event to qualify their athletes for the Rio Games later this summer. I was assigned Turn 1 at the end of a dock for both races.



Figure 2 Competition course. 10k in red and the 5k followed the pink line after Turn 3

The starts were chaos as all of the swimmers were sprinting the approximately 200 yards from the start to get into position for the turn and all of the athletes pretty much arrived at the same time. Then, there was absolutely nothing to do for about 20 minutes while they swam the rest of the course. The nice thing about being at Turn 1 was that, after the last athlete had cleared, I could walk back to the finish area to watch the end of the race. The finish of the Women's race was amazing as local (Syracuse) product Ashley Twichell overcame a body length deficit over the last 50-60 yards or so in the finish chute to out

touch Italian Rachele Bruni by .2 seconds! The Men's race featured a DQ of the winner (Andrew Gemmell) followed by 2 protests. The second protest overturned the call and the original winner was the winner once again.

Day 3 (Saturday, 4/9)

Saturday was the Open Water Festival that featured several lesser distance Age Group events, a 'buddy swim' with young kids paired with the World Class athletes for a 100 yard swim, and capped off with the Fran Crippen Sunset Mile in the evening. I was assigned a boat position during the morning events and was on a dock near Turn 3 for the afternoon/evening events. The younger athletes got a lot more spread out over the course than the elite athletes. Also, there were many more athletes and, even though a staggered start of 5 minutes was used between the Boys and Girls events, they all became intermingled after a bit and it was really difficult to keep track of the athletes.

Day 4 (Sunday, 4/10)

Day 4 was the Men's and Women's 5k National Championship and I was assigned a boat position for both races. Spent a lot of time counting and keeping an eye on swimmers. Exciting finishes in both races as 1 – 4 of the Women touched within .3 seconds of each other and 1 – 3 of the Men touched within .3 seconds of each other.

Overall Observations

Though I wished there was video of violations during the clinic, it was very helpful to be able to take what we learned and immediately apply it to what we were seeing in competition. Athlete safety was impressed upon me because of all the things that were done (tattooing, videotaping, nail trimming, etc.) in the name of safety. I also learned about the positions of OW Referee, Assistant Referee, and Turn Judge. The Referee was just as, if not more, concerned with boat management (i.e., safety coverage for the athletes) than with watching for actual violations. That's where it helped having a Ref, Asst. Ref, and several Judges on each boat as all could assist counting athletes, observing for violations, etc.



Submitted by:

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5/5/16