

Officials and Their Duties

By Fred Cruciger, Longtime Florida USS Official and Swim Parent

When you as a parent go to a swimming meet you may not be totally familiar with the officials and their duties. In order to gain a better understanding of the functions of the officials, it might be a good idea to discuss the duties of each position and then to explain just how a person becomes an official.

The referee is the key official and is in complete charge of the competition. The referee makes decisions based upon the technical rules of swimming and assigns and supervises the other officials working the meet. The referee is the person who stands at the starting end of the pool and signals the starter when the race is ready to begin. No disqualification is final until the referee has signed the disqualification slip. The referee is the final authority.

The starter is responsible for ensuring a fair start to each race. He or she gives commands that are designed to inform the swimmer of the stroke and distance, to bring the swimmers to the proper starting position, and once all swimmers are motionless, he or she signals the race to begin with either the beeper or gun start.

There will also be stroke and turn judges stationed around the pool. They are charged with the specific responsibility of ensuring that the swimmers conform to the established rules of competition for that specific event. Each stroke has specific rules and it is up to these officials to enforce them.

Officials are well trained. The first level is that of a stroke and turns official. They can then progress to starter and finally to referee. Each level requires a clinic which is conducted by a certified clinic instructor. After the clinic there is a test and also a requirement for an apprenticeship period. During this time the apprentice works with a certified official to learn under actual competitive conditions. Once all of these phases are completed, the official is certified.

Once certified, each official must be recertified every two years. This is to ensure that each and every official is fully current on the rules. Rules change, and it is absolutely necessary for each official to be up to date.

Rules can vary from very basic to highly complex. The key to the rules is contained in the first paragraph of the United States Swimming Rules and Regulations. It states "...so that no swimmer shall obtain unfair advantage over another." That is the reason for rules. Also, officials are instructed to make sure that every benefit goes to the swimmer. In other words, if an official is unsure about a possible rule infraction, the benefit goes to the swimmer.

Officials signal a disqualification by raising a hand for about 20 seconds, or until the referee sees it. The purpose of the raised hand is not to signal any specific swimmer, but to call attention to the fact that a disqualification has taken place. The official calling the infraction will then write it up on paper, sign it and forward it to the referee for signature. Once signed by the referee the disqualification is official.

The referee is the only official who can be approached by a coach. The referee must know all of the details so that if approached by the coach, all of the necessary information will be at hand.

Officials and coaches must work together. The coach wants his swimmer to be disqualified if there is an infraction. This becomes a teaching aid for the coach. If you, as a parent, have a question about a disqualification, contact your coach. Do not go to the referee. If the coach needs more information to answer your question, the coach will go to the referee.

Officials have a large responsibility. In virtually every case they are volunteers. They are not paid. They do this for the benefit of the sport. The chances are that they will have their own children in that meet.

All of the officials do their best to be as fair and reasonable as possible. However, if they observe a rule violation, they will call a disqualification. That is why they are there.

Every meet must have a full staff of officials and this may be something that you might wish to try. One thing for certain, it sure makes the meet go more quickly! Contact any of the officials at the next meet you attend and ask them the procedure to become a certified official. It is a good way to learn some of the rules of the sport, contribute to the meet, and to show your children that you are supporting them.

Please Remember that at each meet the Kona Dolphins participate each team must provide 1 official or timer per 5 swimmers entered in the meet. It is very important that we get your support in this department in all of our meets. If you are interested in becoming an official or helping as a timer please contact Coach Kathy at 329-3527. Mahalo Nui for all your Kokua!!