

What Do All the Officials Do?

“I see a whole bunch of folks in white shirts on the deck. Are they all looking to DQ my child?! Why do they need so many officials?”

It takes a lot of people to run a swim meet. Probably the most visible individuals are the volunteer meet officials, who can be divided into those working the “dry side” and those working the “wet side”.

Dry side officials are led by the Administrative Official, or “AO.” This person is responsible for the accurate processing of entries, the accurate seeding of the events, determining the official times and results, and the posting of the results. The AO is assisted by the electronic timing system operator, the results computer operator, and others. Each of these volunteers has undergone training and worked several sessions as an apprentice before being evaluated and certified by PNS in their positions.

Stroke and Turn Judges are the most numerous of the wet side officials. Each of these officials has jurisdiction for specific lanes, observing that the swimmers in these lanes are complying with the rules for each stroke. If a rules violation is observed, the judge raises one hand overhead. The violation is reported to the Chief Judge, an experienced official who ensures that the call is indeed a violation, that it is within the S&T Judge’s jurisdiction, and that the judge has absolutely no doubt what he/she saw. Like the dry side officials, these judges have undergone training, have worked as apprentice judges, have taken comprehensive rules tests, and have undergone evaluation by an experienced official before being certified by PNS. In addition, they are required to pass criminal background checks and to take athlete protection courses prior to stepping on deck.

Another wet side official is the Starter, the person who says, “Take your mark,” and activates the starting unit to begin each race. The Starter confirms that each swimmer has assumed a legal starting position and aims to do everything possible to ensure that the start is fair for all competitors. This official is required to have extensive experience as a Stroke and Turn Judge before even initiating training as a Starter.

Finally, there’s the Referee, a highly-experienced and knowledgeable official who is in charge of the entire competition. The Referee ensures that all rules and procedures are followed with fairness and consistency. His/her whistles signal the swimmers, coaches, and officials that the competition can begin. He/she closely observes the start of each heat and confirms whether a fair start has been achieved. He/she handles any protests or disagreements. After conferring with the Chief Judge, the Referee makes the final determination regarding all disqualifications. He/she is the final arbitrator on any matter relating to the conduct of the meet.

Officials at PNS meets regularly attend clinics and training sessions. They are required to take and pass rules tests on a frequent basis. Many choose to further their education as officials by undertaking the stringent requirements for national certification. Those folks in the white shirts are some of the most dedicated volunteers you’ll see on the pool deck. No, they’re not looking for disqualifications, but they’re expected to report it if one is observed.