

In This Issue

1. Officials: More Than Just Polos and Khakis
2. Your Rule Book – It Tells a Story

[Join Us On Facebook](#)**APPLY NOW**

Applications are now being accepted for **Winter Nationals Meets and Arena Pro Swim Series in Minneapolis**. [Click here to apply.](#)

Officials: More Than Just Polos and Khakis

By Franny Dean and Ellie Walstad

Athlete Representatives on the USA Swimming Officials Committee

Swim meet staples: a pool, swimmers, blocks, and a timing system all quickly come to mind. But perhaps the most important ingredient of a swim meet is the group of volunteers wearing polo shirts and khakis: the officials. They are neither hiding nor wearing capes of invisibility, but athletes rarely notice or appreciate them. In being appointed members of the USA Swimming Officials Committee, as athletes we have gained a new perspective on this important facet of our sport.

Athletes rarely think of officials lest they have a complaint. “I can’t believe they held the start so long!” “My relay exchange was totally legal!” “I most definitely touched with two hands!” We’ve all heard these complaints around the pool deck and perhaps made some ourselves, but have you ever looked at meets from an official’s perspective? Officials spend hours volunteering on a pool deck to ensure that you have a fair opportunity to compete. In addition to judging the legality of our strokes, (the task most associated as the duty of an official) they work behind the scenes to facilitate our meets by performing tasks ranging from processing entries to producing meet results. Officials are always looking out for us. We had the opportunity to talk to Carol Zaleski, an official and the chairman of the FINA technical committee, and learned about the site checks she performs before international meets. She, along with other officials, visits every major meet venue to assess the quality of the natatorium and ensure athletes will have adequate seating areas, changing areas, warm down areas, and more. This is just one example of the work rarely seen by swimmers that officials do to keep the swimming world a well-oiled machine.

In becoming members of the USA Swimming Officials Committee, we have learned to see swimming from a new perspective and notice those staples in white. National Officials Committee chair, Jim Holcomb, asked us at the committee meeting in San Antonio about our swim meet pet peeves. We described our annoyance with slow starts (the kind where it feels like you have been taking your mark for eternity before you can finally go). The response from the group was a chuckle, “Well, if only you’d all go down at the same time...” What we perceive as an error by an official could really be the fault of a nervous swimmer two lanes down.

Similarly, officials do not make disqualifications because they are nit-picky or dislike your stroke, but rather to ensure fair competition for all athletes. Imagine how it would feel to be beat by a swimmer performing three illegal butterfly kicks during your 100 Breaststroke. Officials are there to prevent that. They are so focused on being fair that any disqualification that is incorrectly written up or incorrectly processed must be investigated. The

benefit always rests with the athlete.

Through our experience on the committee, we have come to realize how much officials love the sport of swimming. They volunteer hours of their time to reviewing the rule book, taking online certification tests, and standing on a stuffy pool deck because they enjoy it. Many officials were once swimmers. Jim used to swim distance freestyle. Other officials got bored of sitting in the stands during their children's meets and fell in love with being an on deck volunteer. Carol got started this way.

Officials enjoy working swim meets. During meals and meeting breaks in San Antonio, officials' committee members entertained us with stories from meets. We heard about Olympians being disqualified, athletes boisterously protesting their calls, and even some fun personal anecdotes. Jim recounted the hilarious story of a swimming race between himself and another official a few years ago between sessions at a meet. Jim remarked that he would have won had his swim trunks not fallen off at the flip turn. Jay Thomas, head of the Rules and Regulations committee, told us that he remembers something from every national meet he has officiated. Swimmers get ribbons and medals from swim meets; officials get stories.

We also mentioned at the committee meeting in February that officials can be intimidating to athletes. Committee members were disappointed to hear so. Jim explained that he simply has an "intimidating disposition," but that he is really very warm and inviting. Other officials commented about a time where Carol looked extremely serious on camera escorting Missy Franklin to and from the warm down facilitates between events at an international meet. Carol laughed, and explained she was just very focused on getting Missy to where she needed to be. Officials are often concentrating so hard on making our meets run smoothly that they can appear cross when they are in actuality very friendly and excited.

Next time you are at a swim meet, we urge you to look at the meet from an official's perspective, and perhaps thank one of them for all the work they do behind the scenes. Like we've discovered, you too can notice the watchful in white at the end of your lane. They deserve a thank you; not just for the countless splashes they endure and the crazy swimmers they have to deal with, but for their continuous support of the greatest sport.

Your Rule Book – It Tells a Story

By Jay Thomas, Chair
USA Swimming Rules and Regulations Committee

I truly enjoy working with officials from all around the country. As the Rules Committee Chairman, I receive questions via email,

phone and sometimes in person. Almost without exception, when I am answering a rules question, I get out my rulebook. I read the applicable rule carefully, I search the rule book for other rules that may be related and might affect the answer to the inquiry. Sometimes I have the pleasure of answering questions in person. When we delve into the question at hand, I almost always ask the official to get out their rule book so we can discuss the issue together.

Our rule book is published and distributed each January. Most of the rules are effective May 1 of that year. In many years, there are rules published that are effective either immediately after the House of Delegates meeting or on some date prior to the normal May 1, effective date (look inside the front cover for the section "Major Legislation and Rule Changes".) When that rule book comes out of the official's bag, what it looks like and how the official handles it tells a story. So here is the story our exchange might tell;

1. If it is January - April and the official pulls out the next years rule book and they don't have the current years book, chances are they were never told how our rules process works.
2. If it is January – April and they pull out the current years book, I sometimes ask of they have next year's book to see if they are aware that there may be some rules changes that are effective earlier than the May 1 normal effective date.
3. Throughout the year, the rule book tells a story. What is the condition of this official's book? Later in the year - Is the book worn and tattered, perhaps being held together by a couple of rubber bands or duct tape? Is it filled with notes and highlights (good signs!) Or, does it look like the day it came in the mail.
4. When we begin the discussion, does the official turn promptly to the appropriate section of the rules? Or do they fumble and stumble demonstrating a lack of familiarity with the layout of the book.

When I am working a meet of any level, I spend some time just prior ensuring I am refreshed on the rules that apply to my role in the meet and the type of meet that I am officiating at. Many of us work meets from other organizations (NCAA, NFHS, summer recreation leagues, etc.). There are numerous variations in the rules and application of those rules and we need to carefully review and refresh our understanding of the rules for the meet at hand. Get out the book and read. Make sure you understand the rule. Periodically go to the USA Swimming website and read through the Situations and Resolutions so that you have a more complete understanding of how to apply those rules. Use the Rules and Regulations section of the website. Look at the top navigation bar – ABOUT/RULES AND REGULATIONS.

When at a meet, use the rule book. Even at the highest level meets, I almost always get out my rule book and review the text prior to ruling on complex issues. Never once have I ever been criticized by a coach or other official for getting out the book. You are not likely to get the look of “doesn’t he know the rule?” rather, you will probably get the look – “that official cares enough to want to make sure he/she gets it right.”

The worse thing we can do as officials is to make a bad call or misapply a rule. Our rule book is an important document. Read it, get to know it, use it. Thanks again for everything you do for our sport.