

# Athletes and Officials: We're on the Same Team

JW Marriott Houston Downtown

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# Agenda

- A) Thoughts and Priorities of Athletes and Officials
- B) Some Thoughts on Philosophy
- C) Connection, Interaction, and Building Relationships
- D) “Athlete Centered” Officiating
- E) Questions?

# Lead-In Question

- As officials, what are you primarily thinking about at a meet?
- Frequent concerns?
- Major priorities?

# Common Thoughts of Athletes at Meets...

- **This is an important race!! I'm nervous!!**
- When is my race? Are we running ahead of schedule? On schedule? Behind schedule?
- How do these blocks work? How do I adjust the wedge?
- What about the backstroke ledge? Where can I put my feet?
- What's the water temperature?
- These lane lines look too loose!
- These backstroke flags are really blowing in the wind...

# Common Thoughts of Athletes at Meets...

- I don't want to swim one of my events. What do I do?
- Is my suit legal?
- Which end of the pool do the 50s start at?
- Where do I report to parade for finals? When do I need to be there?
- I missed my race! Now what do I do?
- Do I have to check in for the 1500?
- Can I do a time trial?

# Bringing it Together

- Lots of common ground
- Officials oftentimes have the answers to the questions posed by the athletes
- So how do we communicate better? How do we better work as a team?

# Some Thoughts on Philosophy....

- Virtually all of the USA Swimming officiating philosophy works in favor of the athletes....as it should.
- When teaching new officials, these philosophical aspects of officiating are equally important—if not more important—than the technical aspects
  - Swimmer gets the benefit of the doubt
  - Observation vs. Inspection
  - Refraining from inferences or extrapolations
  - “Call what you see, See what you call”
  - “What does the rule say?”
- The officials exist for the swimmers, not the other way around!

# Connection, Interaction, and Building Relationships

- Be professional and personal—at the same time!
- Interactions with athletes and coaches in other settings—i.e. practices, socials
- Build partnerships with teams—use of practice time for education of both swimmers and officials. It shows that we care!
- Thorough explanation of disqualifications and rules to swimmer, when in appropriate setting.

# Connection, Interaction, and Building Relationships

- Invite athletes to officials briefings and technical meetings.
- Explain and share the philosophy!
- Social media?
- Incorporation of athlete representatives on LSC Officials Committees
- Above all, **be a resource** and **show your human side!**

# Athlete Centered Officiating

- What does it mean to be athlete centered?
  - Make your priorities the things that have a direct impact on the athletes!
  - Put the concerns of the athletes (and then the coaches) first.
  - Everything else is secondary. Or maybe, even, completely irrelevant!

# Principles of Athlete Centered Officiating

- Plan ahead.
- Be practical.
- Offer customer service.
- Be consistent.
- Be human.

# Plan Ahead

- Involve both officials and athletes in meet planning—both can foresee potential problems!
- Word meet information clearly. Be concise and adhere to the rules, but don't leave ambiguities or unanswered questions.
- Follow the meet information! Clearly communicate any changes, facility-specific information, and important reminders at the technical meeting.
- Also email and post important information; **make it directly accessible to the athletes** (i.e. heat sheet)!
- Nobody likes surprises!!

# Be Practical

- Understand why the rules exist
- When possible, allow the athletes to decide
  - “When would you be ready to do your re-swim?”
  - “How would you like to resolve this tie?”
- Look for reasons to allow an athlete to swim, not keep him/her from doing so.
- Remember that mistakes happen. Nobody is perfect; try to be understanding!
- It's not rocket science or brain surgery. It's a swim meet!

# Offer Customer Service

- “How can we help you?”
- Be a **solution**, not an additional problem!
- Proactively remind coaches and swimmers of deadlines, updates.
- **Explain** to the swimmers/coaches things that they do not understand!
- **Remember, you are looking out for the swimmer**...for things that they might forget during the pressures of competition!
- Be the bright spot, someone that they can count on, amid their stress!

# Be Consistent

- “But you let **him** do it!” “But they let me do it **last week!**”
- Important to develop consistency throughout **all levels of meets** throughout the LSC; **NO SWIMMER** wants to be disqualified for the first time at a championship meet!
- Treat all levels of swimmers and meets with the same professionalism and high-quality officiating.
- Remember that all decisions have the potential to set precedents in the minds of coaches and swimmers. Conversely, don’t let the slippery slope **fallacy** inhibit your use of common sense!

# Be Human

- Even when wearing the white shirt, you are still a human being! Act like one!
- Remember that your attitude and approach sets the tone for the entire pool deck, including the swimmers!
- Be warm, friendly, and maintain your sense of humor on deck! Smile at the swimmers, say hello, wish them good luck, etc. Don't be a stranger!
- Look like you're having fun on deck! (It's a much better image than looking asleep!)
- The Goal: Friendly and Professional

# Takeaways

- The officials exist for the athletes, **NOT** the other way around!
- Make your priorities the things that most **directly** impact the **athletes**!
- Be a **solution**.
- Be a **human**.

# Questions?