

“The Alphabet of Swim Officiating”

Guidelines to Professionalism in Swim Officiating

The rules of any sport are designed to be applied by officials and it is no less so in our sport of swimming. In our venue an infraction of the rules can eliminate an athlete from the competition, a rarity in athletic events. There is no penalty box or point deductions, but rather elimination. With such an awesome responsibility we may rightly ask -

“What makes a good official?”

What makes a good official is knowledge of the rules and their intent. Knowledge of the rules builds an appreciation for them. The rules of swimming are design-ed to provide fair conditions of competition for all. Our rules codify the principle that “no swimmer shall obtain an unfair advantage over another.” The rules must be interpreted with ALL the swimmers in mind. The only acceptable officiating philosophy then, must be to conduct any and all swim meets according to the written rules that everyone has had a chance to see, to *know*, and to understand prior to a meet. We cannot suspend any rule that we do not like. Our legislative process is designed to allow for democratic dissent by proposing for adoption at each USAS convention changes to our code, but once adopted we must live by those written rules. A good official must understand the philosophy and intent of the rule. There are many fine rules-people who can’t officiate, but there aren’t any fine officials who don’t understand the rules.

Officiating to some is the ability to “run the show”. A good official is often perceived as one who gets things done. You know the type; the referee or chief judge who is always running here and there to solve some problem during a meet. It may be that the truly good official is the one - who is **PROACTIVE** rather than **REACTIVE**. The official who considers in advance where a rules problem might occur and plans to solve that eventuality before it occurs, may be a more valuable ally than the official who runs to the store to buy the watches for the timers after the sound of the gun.

A good official arrives early for pre-meet briefings and coaches meetings. The good official has established the lines of verbal and visual communication around the pool before the events. During each heat the good official is alert to everything going on around oneself.

The dividing line between swimmer, coach and official is how differently each looks at the fairness of a competition: A swimmer - wants a fair start and knowledgeable stroke and turn judges. A coach - wants to project out-comes and doesn’t want an official to determine that outcome. An official - doesn’t care who wins, he just cares that the race is swum fairly and within the rules.

When a volunteer official enters the pool deck an aura of professionalism must also enter with him/her. The approved officiating uniform of the day must be clean and pressed, the deck shoes must be polished, and the whistle shiny. Becoming a professional volunteer swim official doesn’t just happen. It takes effort, ability, study and diligence. The key to success is the mind set that “**I am a Good Official.**”

Many suggest that the good official is the one who is diligent in his/her efforts to provide the athlete, coach and other volunteers with a professionally officiated contest. The professional swim official is the one who has learned the alphabet of swim officiating.

“The Alphabet of Swim Officiating”

The professional swim official is the one:

- A** who considers it a privilege, not an obligation to officiate;
- B** who keeps a balanced outlook;
- C** who is consistent and provides a uniform interpretation and application of the rules in all situations;
- D** who maintains his/her dignity;
- E** who has respect for all those working to make a swim meet a great experience for young people;
- F** who focuses on observation not expectation, anticipation, nor preference;
- G** who knows his intention is genuine and his attention was correctly focused;
- H** who builds a healthy environment for competition;
- I** who is impartial;
- J** who doesn't make officiating a jousting contest between a competitor and the official;
- K** who has a strong working knowledge of the rules;
- L** who listens;
- M** who puts forth maximum effort before, during & after a meet;
- N** who makes sure a swimmer or coach is notified of a DQ;
- O** who gives the benefit of the doubt to the swimmer;
- P** who has a protective rather than a punitive attitude toward enforcement of the rules;
- Q** who avoids adversarial quarrels and relationships;
- R** who finds it rewarding to serve;
- S** who provides a safe and fair competition for all;
- T** who renders timely decisions;
- U** who is physically fit and has a proper professional appearance;
- V** who recognizes merit in another's point of view;
- W** who doesn't get hung up on worst-case scenarios;
- X** who acts in the spirit of good Sportsmanship;
- Y** who has the valor to make a call they see it;
- Z** who practices zealous, critical Self-evaluation;