

Bob Peterfish

Bob F. Peterfish was born January 6, 1926. During the summer of 1964 he began officiating summer league swimming to help out the team his children were swimming on. From that time forward he dedicated himself and his efforts to advance the sport of swimming - always with the focus on the athlete first. Bob was tireless in his efforts to ensure all athletes, especially those with disabilities, had the opportunity to compete fairly and to share in the experience of athletic competition.

In addition to his service to his country in WWII as a "Sea Going Doggie" radar operator for the US Army, Bob retired from his many years with the The Ohio State University as the Advanced Physics Lab Supervisor and Building Coordinator. But his passion was swimming where Bob contributed his time and talents on the local, national, and even international level. Arguably the most respected swim official in the State of Ohio during his officiating years, Bob committed his time to organizations including Ohio High School swimming, USA Swimming, NCAA swimming, Special Olympics swimming, Ohio Wheelchair Sports Assoc. swimming, Paralympic Swimming, and Ohio School for the Blind swimming. When USA Swimming teamed with Maxwell Awards to recognize one official annually for their dedication and service to the sport, Bob was selected among all officials nationally as the first recipient of the Maxwell Excellence Award in April 2000.

Bob was an Ohio High School Athletic Association swimming and diving official for more than 35 years - having begun his experience in 1970. With the OHSAA, Bob was the Meet Referee for the state high school championships for twenty six years. During this time he served multiple tenures as President of the central district swim officials association, in addition to holding the position of officials scheduling assignor for many of these years. During his time Bob was a mentor to hundreds of new as well as experienced officials, but he was also a friend, coach, and father figure to the many thousands of Ohio high school swimmers who had the opportunity "to be officiated" by him.

Bob was one of the original volunteers recruited to help at the swimming competition at the first Special Olympics State Summer Games held at OSU in 1972. From that point on Special Olympics became his passion and he became the Director of Officials for the State Swim Meet every year until 2007 when poor health forced him to miss his first meet in 35 years. During those years, he recruited Central Ohio Swim Officials, including many from the OHSAA membership, to officiate in the OSO State Swim Meet each year. He officiated at the '87, '91, & '95 Special Olympics World Games, and traveled the State of Ohio to all of the Area Meets to help them organize & recruit Area Swim Officials. In 1996, Bob was named the Honorary Coach for the Special Olympics State Summer Games. The OHSAA swimming officials who Bob recruited to assist with Special Olympics events, became better high school officials because of those opportunities. Their knowledge of swimming was enhanced certainly but more importantly was their respect for the sport in general and for the athlete, no matter what the differences, more specifically. It was Bob's professionalism, guidance, encouragement and "challenge" to his officials that truly separated him from his peers. It's fitting that since 2008 one Ohio Special Olympics athlete is recognized annually with the "Bob Peterfish Sportsmanship Award."

No matter if the venue was high school or Special Olympics, Bob's technical knowledge of the rules of swimming and his abilities to interpret them wisely and fairly was unmatched, yet it was his good humor and respect for all athletes at all levels that made him beloved by the swimming community – officials, coaches and athletes alike. Over the years, swimmers from central Ohio and beyond got to know him as "Mr. Peterfish" and it was not unusual to see an athlete exit the pool after a race and run to him to tell him how they had done. He always greeted them with a smile, a hug and a "Well done!" There will always be only one "Mr. Peterfish".