

## **The Referee – Making and Overturning Calls**

**By Ed Ruth, Southern California Swimming**

In our sport of swimming the Referee is charged with a great many duties and responsibilities and as such, the position of Referee is usually filled by a person that knows the rules, has considerable experience and shows good judgment. However, even with all these attributes there are times when the Referee must make difficult decisions in the application of a rule with little guidance other than wording of the rule. For example, consider when to make a personal call for an observed violation or when to overrule a call by another official. Perhaps a short discussion on each topic might help with the thought process in determining when to apply these responsibilities.

Rule 102.13.2 gives the Referee the authority to disqualify a swimmer for any violation of the rules that is personally observed and rule 102.10.1 requires that disqualifications only be made by officials within whose jurisdiction the infraction has been committed and that when an infraction has been observed the official, including the Referee, shall immediately raise one hand overhead. Also keep in mind that an additional responsibility of the Referee as provided in rule 102.15.5 is that the Referee shall insure that all swimmers shall have fair, equitable, and uniform conditions of judging. Therefore, the Referee must maintain a balance between these rules and other duties using a great deal of common sense, judgment and discretion when deciding whether to make a call on a violation personally observed. When taken in context with these rules, the Referee certainly has the authority but not necessarily the mandate to make a call as it first might appear. Many Referees are cautious in disqualifying a swimmer, especially when it involves stroke and turn violations, unless the violations are blatant, egregious and have been missed by the official assigned that jurisdiction.

For example, the Referee assigns available officials at a meet according to capabilities, experience and certification in order to balance the coverage on deck to give equitable and uniform conditions of judging to all the swimmers. Each official has specific duties and jurisdiction. However, when the Referee (especially the Deck Referee) interjects and begins making a large number of calls from one corner, not only does it upset the balance of judging in that quadrant of the pool but it also may appear to violate rule 102.12.3 that prohibits (except for dual meets) the Referee from acting in the capacity of more than one official. Even if the Referee is only picking up an occasional missed call by the assigned official the perception remains that competitors on that side of the pool are being watched by more officials than in other areas of the pool. If there are calls being missed, especially close calls, it might be better to speak with the official before the next session to determine if more training is necessary before being reassigned than to have the Referee making numerous disqualifications. It is neither desirable nor necessary for the Referee to micromanage the judging of the competition in this manner.

On the other hand, there are times when a Referee should make a call. These are usually situations where the official with jurisdiction is distracted, the violation is flagrant and everyone at the meet has seen the violation except the official. For example, a turn judge has been assigned lanes 5 through 8 at the start end of the pool (no, not all meets are blessed with turn judges for each lane) and watches the swimmers in lanes 5, 7 and 8 legally transition from the backstroke to the breaststroke. However, due to inattention the turn judge returns to his/her chair failing to notice (don't tell me that it hasn't happened to you) that the swimmer in lane 6 is very far behind. The swimmer then does an illegal transition by not finishing on the back before flip turning to the breaststroke. This is a conspicuous and flagrant infraction that could probably be seen in any lane from the Referee's position and so the call is made.

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Other examples of calls that are made by Referees are swimmers that turn over mid-course in the backstroke and swim a little freestyle. Or, a competitor not entered in a race that jumps in the water while a race is still in progress. And, a relay team member other than the swimmer designated to swim the leg of the relay that enters the pool where the race is being conducted prior to all the swimmers finishing the race. In all of these examples the violations are conspicuous and easily observed by the Referee and in the last example often missed by other officials in the confusion of relay races.

Regarding the second topic where a call is overruled by the Referee, rule 102.13.1 allows this action under certain conditions. Specifically, the Referee can overrule any meet official on a point of rule interpretation, or on a judgment decision pertaining to an action which the Referee has personally observed. Most of the time a call is overruled or not accepted because of a point of rule interpretation rather than the later. The official making the call is either out of position, out of jurisdiction, or doesn't apply the rule correctly to the infraction that is described. For example, when questioned about a disqualification for a non-simultaneous touch at the turn the official describes that the hands touched at the same time but one was above and the other was below the water surface. This is a misapplication of the rule. These call reversals are usually straight forward and with a little practice the Referee can usually ascertain in a fair manner whether a call should stand.

However, overruling a disqualification of a judgment decision by another official that the Referee personally observes is a little more problematic and is associated with many of the same pitfalls as described in the first topic. As before, the Referee must use a great deal of common sense, judgment and discretion when overruling a judgment call. Usually the Referee spends most of his/her time at the start end and side of the pool so that most of the swimmers that would be affected by a call reversal of this type would be in those lanes closest to the Referee bringing to question as to whether the requirement for uniform conditions of judging is being met. Also, the Referee when exercising this option needs to be in a position similar to the other officials making observations within that jurisdiction to maintain uniformity in judging. This rarely is the case and Referees should use caution in overruling a disqualification unless they are absolutely sure that the original call was incorrect.

One obvious example of when a call might be reversed is when the deck official reports the wrong lane. Perhaps it is a turn judge watching several lanes on the starting side of the pool and becomes confused while scanning over the lanes at the start of the race and observes a swimmer do a downward butterfly kick at the beginning of the breaststroke. The Referee also notes the infraction, lane number and that the swimmer is wearing a bright yellow cap. None of the other swimmers in adjacent lanes are observed by the Referee doing an illegal kick nor are wearing a yellow cap. When the wrong lane is reported to the Referee the call is overruled because the Referee is absolutely certain that the wrong swimmer has been disqualified.

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In another example, during the 200 yard backstroke the Referee notices that a swimmer two lanes over during the turn at 100 yards begins to pull and roll with the left arm before the shoulder goes past vertical, continues to roll onto the breast and then does a single pull with the right arm. Due to inexperience the turn judge disqualifies the swimmer at the 100 yard turn for taking two strokes during the turn thinking that the pull with the left arm was the single allowed continuous pull. The Referee overrules the call noting that the turn judge made an incorrect call as the shoulder had not past vertical when the pull with the left arm was initiated and thus did not become part of the continuous turning action. In these examples, the incorrect calls are conspicuous and the Referee is in a position to see them clearly. In the interest of fairness and in keeping the competition equitable the Referee has made the decision to reverse the calls.

The Referee has a great deal of authority and responsibility. When making a decision to call a violation or to overrule another official the Referee must always use common sense, judgment and a great deal of discretion to insure that all the swimmers have fair, equitable, and uniform judging. It is preferable to manage the judging of the competition by careful assignment and placement of deck officials rather than micromanaging the meet by making numerous personal calls. However, occasionally when infractions are conspicuous, flagrant and missed or incorrectly called by other officials the Referee may have to personally disqualify a swimmer in maintaining the balance for fair, equitable and uniform judging.

As you apply the rules, whether as Referee or in another capacity, keep in mind a few basic principles in officiating swimming. Be an observer not an inspector; call what you see not what you don't see; and, finally, the benefit of the doubt always goes to the athlete.