

# The Referee and the Rules

by Anneliese Eggert

Good Morning. I am most happy to be here again this year to give you my thoughts about the referee and the rules. As we discussed last night, the main objective of the National Officials Committee, and of this seminar, is to obtain consistency in officiating throughout USA Swimming, from one area of the country to another, and from one meet to another! A swimmer should be able to attend a meet anywhere in USA Swimming and be assured that he or she will be judged fairly, equitably and with the same high standard of officiating. The person who has the most influence on the quality of officiating at a meet and how the rules are applied is the referee and that's why the combination of the referee and the rules is so important.

First, the rules: The USA Swimming rules are the same for all of us. They don't differ from one meet to another or from one region to another. But people differ, not only in their interpretation of the written rules but in the way they choose to apply or to NOT apply them.

Should the starter decide not to call a false start because it's only the first heat and they won't place anyway? Won't this swimmer's time be compared with that of swimmers in the second, third and subsequent heats, so shouldn't it be under the same conditions? And isn't the slowest swimmer entitled to the same officiating as the fastest?

Should the stroke & turn judge decide not to call an infraction because the swimmer really didn't get any advantage? Let me give you an example of that one. The most controversial call on the new backstroke turn is "flotation independent of the turn" — right? How many times have you heard the argument "the swimmer gains no advantage from that so he shouldn't be disqualified?" Let me tell you the answer I gave to that question at a coaches' seminar:

The rules themselves, and I quote, "are designed to provide fair and equitable conditions of competition and promote uniformity in the sport so that no swimmer shall obtain unfair advantage over another." Most officials are NOT coaches. They are NOT experts in determining what makes one swimmer faster than another or what gives him an advantage. They are charged with applying the rules, as written, to all swimmers.

If we are experiencing inconsistency in application of the rules when they are exactly the same for everyone, imagine what it would be like if each stroke & turn could decide for himself what was "advantageous" or not!

If a rule seems unfair, get it changed! Rules are not static, they are dynamic. They change as new techniques are developed. Remember when they allowed no vertical motion in a breaststroke kick, or when the head couldn't go below the surface of the water at turns? Some of you may even remember when the butterfly was just a variation of the breaststroke. It wasn't legalized as a separate competitive stroke until the late 1950's!

Any member of USA Swimming can propose a rule change to be considered by the USA-S House of Delegates. Just remember when you propose a change that we have worked long and hard to bring the rules of FINA, USA-S and NCAA together!

What we need to emphasize in each of our LSCs and at every meet we attend is that the rules should not be arbitrarily waived but must be applied fairly and consistently to all swimmers! So we need our other ingredient, the referee.

USA Swimming Rule 102.13.1 says the referee

"Shall have full authority over all officials and shall assign and instruct them; shall enforce all applicable rules and shall decide all questions relating to the actual conduct of the meet, the final settlement of which is not otherwise assigned by said rules...."

Our rules give the referee a lot of authority and with that authority he can have a great impact on the consistency and the quality of officiating at a meet. He makes sure the rules are applied equitably and fairly, he sets the standard for officiating and greatly influences the atmosphere of the meet. Not only does he need a great deal of knowledge and experience to fulfill his duties but, as the highest ranking official, he (or she) needs the right attitude in order to run a meet successfully! One of the best quotes I've read was by Peter Drucker in Fortune Magazine:

"Rank does not confer privilege or give power. It imposes responsibility."

Certainly that statement holds true for every referee. To put it simply, a swim meet reflects the "professionalism" of its referee, his knowledge, experience, preparation, leadership, his willingness to accept responsibility and his ability to make everyone work together as a team.

I figure a referee can either be a chicken or a duck. The referee who tries to do everything himself ends up looking like a chicken without a head and gets everyone else nervous and on edge in the process. Not an atmosphere conducive to good competition. The "duck type" on the other hand looks calm and confident on top, even though he may be paddling like mad underneath. His effort is a constructive one assigning, instructing and making sure everyone is doing their job well. The goal of every meet referee is to make himself obsolete, to get things running so smoothly that all he has to do is blow the whistle!

How do you do that? First, know the rules, all of them, the USA Swimming rules, your LSC rules and any special rules incorporated in your meet information sheet. Don't just learn the blue pages of the USA-S rules. The white pages (particularly Section 2) have a lot of rules that apply to swim meet administration. For instance, if your LSC does not have an adopted scratch rule, try using the scratch procedure for National Championships contained in Section 207.7.9.

Do you have pools in your LSC located at altitudes of 3,000 feet or more? Are they aware of the Altitude Time Adjustments shown in Section 207.11.5?

What about the four-hour rule in Section 205.3.1 F? Does it apply to your meet? If it does, how are you going to handle it (fairly and equitably) if your meet is too long? You'd better spell out the conditions in your meet sheet!

Any special things that may become controversial should be covered in your meet sheet. Which is why I always suggest that you:

- (1) select your meet referee well ahead of time, and
- (2) let him read your meet information *before* its submitted for sanction.

You'd be surprised how many problems you can *prevent* by that one step.

Once you know the rules, then what? Well, a referee is just like a swimmer. A swimmer can read about how to do the strokes in a book, but he's certainly not going to be very good until he actually gets in the water and works at it! So next, our referee should be experienced.

He should be familiar enough with swim meet procedures to be able to prevent problems from happening and to be able to fix whatever does go wrong. Today's referee needs more knowledge and experience than ever before.

Many of you have heard me describe the simplicity of swim meets when I first started officiating about 28 years ago. We had three dial watches on each lane (remember the old 30-second or 10-second watches?). That was the timing system! We had three balls — blue, red and white. That was our judging and awards system! A blue ball was thrown in the lane of the swimmer who touched first, a red in the second place swimmer's lane, and a white in the third place lane. Then someone followed behind and handed the swimmer a matching color ribbon. Now that's a simple awards system, no middle man!

Compare that with the touchpads, scoreboards, push buttons, strobe lights and computers that are commonplace at most meets today and you'll also realize how much more complicated the job of the referee has become. Just remember that, in addition to familiarizing himself with all our modern swim meet gadgets, the referee must also stay "brushed up" on the basics and I do mean basics!

Let me tell you about an Officials Clinic and Novice Meet that Walt and I refereed the beginning of last year. During the clinic, we included sessions on manual deck-seeding of a meet, how to determine an official time from three watches, how to do "across-the-board" or, as some of you call it, "sweep judging," and how to use the ballot system to determine final placing when there were discrepancies. Several people commented, "Oh, we'll never use that stuff. Our meet is computerized and we have automatic timing equipment!"

Well, of course you know what happened. The automatic timing equipment failed to arrive so we passed out three watches and assigned a couple of place judges. The computer, thank goodness, was up and running and we were about 5 minutes out from deck seeding the first events.

At this point, the only computer operator familiar with the program found out he was expected to enter the swimmers from individual cards, not consolidated entry forms. His comment was "I'm not doing a meet that way" and he walked out! We had a quick refresher on manual entry and seeding and the meet actually started on time! Even the ballot system proved to be a simple affair after a few basic procedures were installed and, at the end of the day, everyone agreed that swim meets can run smoothly without machines! So, as the referee, be aware of those old-fashioned basic procedures. You may be the only one around who knows them when everything goes wrong!

Another step before you actually referee a meet, know every other job on the deck! How can you instruct other officials and help them solve problems if you don't know what they are doing? Another local meet last year, deck-seeded, but we still ended up with empty lanes because the clerk of the course kept missing "non checked-in" swimmers on the check-in sheet! Having worked the position quite often, I could suggest some procedures that would prevent those errors and, sure enough, the problem disappeared.

But, let's assume you're a full-fledged certified, carded, knowledgeable and experienced referee. What would you do in preparation for your meet? We have often emphasized the referee's role in preparing for a swim meet and I don't mean washing your whites, sewing your patches on and polishing your whistle! I do mean the referee's coordination with the meet director, the need to become familiar with

the conditions and restrictions of the pool, the need to make sure entries are being processed properly, etc. Those items are included in a sample "Referee's Reminder" list which has since been incorporated in your "Officiating Swimming" Handbook. By the way, I'd like you to add a couple of items to that checklist. Under "Facility", don't forget to check the water depth at the start end (or ends) and to make sure the blocks are the correct height for that depth. I won't spend anymore time now going over the other items in the checklist but I do want to emphasize that they are all important!

One of the most important is to make sure, before the meet, you are going to have enough officials. Swimmers are much more likely to be judged fairly when there is a full complement of officials on the deck rather than too few. Mistakes are more likely to happen when a turn judge is trying to watch 4 lanes turn at the same time and just catches a glimpse of something out of the corner of his eye. With too many lanes to watch, it's easy to miss the quick slip touch on the breast or fly and be convinced it was a one-hand touch. Remember our goal of consistency. If you really want to see a coach come unglued, see what happens when his swimmer is disqualified for something and the swimmer in the very next lane, who did the same thing, isn't! I've known clubs with very few officials who have no trouble getting enough people for their meets because they work at the other clubs' meets and those officials feel obligated to return the favor. If it's a very large meet, you might even consider recruiting a second referee to help out on the deck when you're busy.

Which brings up another subject. I'm often asked about the differences between a meet referee, an administrative referee and a deck referee.

In your packet today, you have an "organizational chart" (to be published in the July issue of "Splash!") of a swim meet that uses all of them so, just briefly, let me describe what they do.

The administrative referee oversees all of the "paperwork" procedures and problems at the meet, including the registration, entries, check-in and seeding, timing adjustments, results and preparation of finals sheets.

The deck referee handles the competition itself. All or a portion of the "on-deck" responsibilities. This is the most visible part of a referee's job and the only one most people are aware of. Both the administrative referee and deck referee are "assistant referees."

The meet referee is the head referee who oversees the total meet, coordinates all its various parts, and personally handles all of the out-of-the-ordinary problems that arise. One thing to keep in mind, even if you have the luxury of one or more referees to help you, there must be only one meet referee who has the final word on any decision and who bears the ultimate responsibility for the meet, including the actions of the assistant referees and other officials!

Most of you are probably thinking you're lucky to get one referee for a meet so let's get on with the job from that viewpoint:

You've performed all the items on your "pre-meet" check list, it's the day of the meet and you get to the pool at least an hour before the scheduled starting time. First, check the facility and equipment, those are the things it takes the longest to fix.

The most common problem I've encountered lately is that they forgot to mark the lane lines at the 15-meter mark (49'2-1/2" from each end wall) in accordance with rule book section 103.13.2. Just a mark on the side of the pool is no longer sufficient. The lane line must be marked around the entire

circumference of the float(s). Hopefully, your meet director remembered you told him to do that but if not, you'd better send somebody out for some bright colored tape immediately.

The other thing to watch for is blocks numbered in the wrong direction, i.e. right to left facing the course, not left to right as in many high school pools. Some of you may remember the true story I related last year when wrong numbering of the blocks created confusion between lanes 4 and 5. The starter and referee called a false start on the swimmer in lane 4. The referee (fairly new to the confusion of a very large meet), walked along the deck and told the swimmer behind the block *numbered* 4 that he was disqualified. An obvious error to those who saw the false start. Unfortunately, no one said anything until after the illegal swimmer had swum and the legal one had not! Now you've got a real problem. One that could have been prevented if, in preparation for the meet, the lanes had been numbered correctly!

If you forget one little detail of preparation, Murphy's Law prevails. Whatever can go wrong, will!

Let's assume you've checked out your facility, the equipment operators are checking the timing system, the starter is checking the starting equipment, you've found no visible "safety hazards", the marshals are in place and warm-ups are going smoothly! Now is the time to meet with the rest of your "team" — emphasis on "team!"

You all know you can't run a successful swim meet by yourself so now's the time to call on your leadership qualities and pull together your deck officials and "section leaders!" Make all of your other volunteer officials feel like a team member; instill a feeling that you are all there to support each other and work together to make this a successful meet for the swimmers. If you can pass on your attitude of "professionalism" to everyone else, you'll make your own job a lot easier and create a much better environment for the swimmers.

If you want to have this meet go smoothly, you've got to let people know what you expect of them and what they can expect from you! Tell them how you plan to do things and what they can do to help you and then don't forget to ask what you can do to make their job easier. A few examples:

Are you taking relay entries on the deck? Talk to your clerk of the course or computer entry people about setting a deadline for those entries and then make sure its announced periodically. What procedures do you want followed for late entries or, in a deck-seeded meet, what about swimmers that forget to check in? Make sure that your instructions are clear!!

At a recent meet, a friend of mine was clerk of the course. The meet was using continuous form cards generated by the computer. Since she was in a rush, she took a batch of cards to her husband and asked if he would "tear them" for her. You do know what happened, don't you? When she went back for them and asked where they were, he pointed to the garbage can where he had dutifully put them after he "tore them up!"

Are you using automatic or semi-automatic timing equipment? If you are, talk to your equipment operators regarding procedures to be followed if the primary system fails. Remember, the rule book says it is the referee's responsibility to determine if a malfunction has occurred. Make sure your timing judge knows the procedures for making a timing system adjustment if a malfunction does occur.

Talk to the desk people. What information will you provide to them on your copy of the heat sheet, program or whatever you call it in your area? Will you be taking "across-the-board" finishes? Will you

be noting disqualifications? I always emphasize that if I have not signed a DQ slip, I want it brought back out to me for review.

It's always a good idea to tell your timing judge and timing equipment operators to let you know immediately if there is a pattern of inaccurate timing in any lane. At a meet last year (the same one with the clerk of course errors), we had a three-button semi-automatic timing system. One of the button pushers in each lane also operated the back-up watch. Teams had been assigned to staff certain lanes so there was a continual rotation of new people into each lane. The second day of the meet, we suddenly noticed one lane where the watch time and one button was consistently nearly a full second faster than the others. We finally asked the head timer to investigate. It seemed the timer pushing the button and watch was brand new and thought that whenever the swimmer entered the area with the solid-colored red floats on the lane lines, you could stop your watch and push the button! Honest!! I guarantee all the stories I tell you are absolutely true! Well, needless to say we held a quick "retraining" session with that timer!

Those are just a few examples of why you want to maintain a constant rapport and communication with those overseeing various parts of the meet! When you meet with your team members, draw a clear line between the decisions you will expect them to make on their own and those that you want referred to you. In general, any matter within their jurisdiction that is clearly covered by the rules would be their decision, anything requiring judgments and decisions outside of their jurisdiction or that might set a precedent should be referred to you.

I can't emphasize enough the part about setting a precedent. Remember, the decisions you make on the first day of the meet establish a precedent for the rest of the meet. Swimmers are entitled to know that what you do for one swimmer you will, under the same circumstances, do for any other swimmer. Make those first decisions carefully! For the same reason, you will want your officials to keep you informed of the decisions they make so you can be sure the rules are being equitably and consistently applied to all swimmers. This is also the best argument I can think of for having the same head referee for the entire meet if at all possible. If you find you do have to change referees between sessions or days of a meet, make sure that any precedents that are set are passed on from one to the other so decisions are made in a consistent manner. Remember, too, that the decisions you make may also affect more than just your meet. Haven't you ever had to turn down a swimmer's request, only to hear "but they let me do it last week!" The very thing we're trying to avoid, treating swimmers differently from meet to meet.

One of your most important meetings before the meet starts will be with the stroke & turn judges. Make sure they are up-to-date on all the rules and that they are interpreting them the same. If there is something you've been having trouble with in your area, like disqualifications for flotation on the backstroke turn, set some guidelines, some reference points for them to follow. You'd be amazed at how much a few well-chosen words at the beginning of the meet can help consistency.

Remind your stroke & turns to be especially sensitive when informing an 8 & under of a DQ. I had a complaint just last week from a coach regarding a stroke & turn who was extremely harsh when talking to the swimmers.

Remember, it is also the referee's responsibility to define the jurisdiction of the stroke & turns. If you're lucky enough to have one, you can turn this meeting over to your head stroke & turn or chief judge, but most of the time it will be your responsibility.

Before you actually start the meet, there is one more group that you want to make part of your team — the coaches! Too often, there tends to be a "we vs. they" attitude between coaches and officials. There

shouldn't be. We are all at a swim meet for the same reason. To see that the swimmers compete under the best and most equitable conditions we can provide! The best way to make them a part of your team is to have a coaches' meeting at the beginning of the meet and inform them of any conditions that will affect their swimmers

What's the timeline for the meet? Will you post it? Is it just an estimate or will you make sure events don't start before the posted time? Which end of the pool will the 25-yard events start from? Will you call for swimmers that don't appear at the blocks? Will there be a lunch break?

Are there any changes in starting or DQ procedures? Remember that coaches don't like surprises!

Something else I've just started recently during the coaches meeting at "novice" and other beginning age-group meets. I've asked the coaches to acquaint themselves with the referee or referees who will be on deck and point them out to their swimmers. How many times have beginning swimmers become confused and not known who to turn to on the deck because their card wasn't there, they forgot what lane they were in, or someone else got on the blocks when they thought they were supposed to swim! I have asked them to please tell their swimmers, "If anything unusual happens, immediately tell the referee. He (or she) can tell you what lane you're in, make sure the right person is in the lane, or even hold up a heat until you put on your suit (if you forgot it!) or change your suit if the one you had on suddenly ripped clear up the back!" We all know those things happen. How many of you have held up a meet to check pads, connections, etc., just to allow a swimmer time to correct or recuperate from some sudden catastrophe!

Another thing you may not have thought of. If you've defined some stroke guidelines for your stroke & turns, don't be afraid to also tell the coaches what you will be looking for.

I believe it is absolutely essential that coaches and officials communicate on stroke interpretations. After all, the coaches are the ones who teach the swimmers HOW to do the strokes. Officials, in turn, judge whether they are done legally. It seems only logical that coaches and officials should know each other's viewpoint. You can save a lot of protests that way and if you can establish a rapport with the coaches before the meet starts, you'll have taken a giant step toward making sure everything goes smoothly.

Okay, warm-ups are over and the pool has been cleared, you have met with everyone involved with running the meet and you're just five minutes from the starting time. Your timers are all in place? If you're like most of us and sometimes have trouble getting enough timers, this is a good time to play the national anthem anyway and run a time check that involves sounding the starting signal. That brings in the parents who have been hiding out in their cars until the last minute so you wouldn't ask them to time!

Now, we're ready and you proceed to put the first heat on the blocks. How? I hope you also remembered to talk to your starter about the procedure you were going to use. The relationship between the starter and referee is one of the most important at a swim meet. It must be a true partnership with each acting as the "eyes and ears" for the other.

In traveling to different areas of the country, I have found to my surprise, that the procedure for putting the swimmers on the blocks and starting the race varies widely. For example, in some cases, the announcer asks the swimmers to step onto the blocks, in others the referee's whistle is used and, in still others, the referee asks them to step onto the blocks and then announces the distance and event before turning the swimmers over to the starter.

The USA Swimming rules do say that the *starter*, on receiving clearance from the referee, directs the swimmers to step onto the blocks. The rules also provide that the *starter*, again upon receiving a signal from the referee, assumes control of the swimmers and notifies them of the distance and event. Within those parameters, you can adopt any procedure that is comfortable.

My own preference is the method currently being used at National Championships:

The referee checks to be sure the pool is clear and the swimmers in the next heat appear to be ready; the starter then verbally asks the swimmers to "step up." When the swimmers are on the blocks, both the referee and starter can check to be sure they are all there. Two sets of eyes are always better than one! If someone is missing, use whatever procedure you told the coaches you would use. At local meets, the starter often calls the name of a missing swimmer. At National Championships, no such call is made but then those swimmers are a little more experienced than the 8 & under who is attending his first swim meet! After all the swimmers are ready, the referee blows the whistle and the starter begins his commands.

But that's enough about starting. Jeannine will cover that much better than I can later — let's get the swimmers in the water and proceed with the meet.

Remember the meet I had last year with the clerk of course errors and the brand new timer? Well, at that same meet, we were at this point when I suddenly realized that the computer operator had forgotten to "reseed" the event after having scratched the swimmers who weren't there! We were handed a very odd looking heat sheet that showed 6 swimmers in the first heat and 2 in the fastest heat! We did a quick reseed on the deck and only lost a couple of minutes! But, it sure proved that the referee also has to know the clerk of the course's job!

Okay, we're ready to start the heat. This is the time to be especially alert! Watch the start and be sure that nothing distracts you. One of life's most embarrassing moments, and a real potential problem, is when the starter has given his commands and is ready to start. Someone taps you on the shoulder (probably the clerk of the course!) and you turn around momentarily, the starting signal goes off, everyone in the stands groans. There has been a flagrant false start, the starter can't call it without your concurrence and you didn't see it! Don't let that happen to you!

Watch and listen at and after the start! More problems seem to occur at the start of a race than at any other time. The most common interference *before* the start is from someone using a flash in the stands. The best time to make an announcement asking people not to use a flash at the start is before it causes a false start, not after. Every referee cringes when he has just disqualified a swimmer for a false start and the announcer decides that this is the best time to make his announcement regarding camera flashes! Whether it had anything to do with the start or not, you can be sure you're going to have a coach down on the deck saying it did!

Same meet, next event (another true story). The clerk came running up to tell me that they had scratched a swimmer in error so you suddenly have a 7-swimmer heat in a 6-lane pool. If you're lucky, the clerk will also have mistakenly seeded in a swimmer who is not there so you can just substitute your 7th swimmer. But chances are you'll again have to do some shuffling, no problem — right? You know how to seed so you calmly ask the swimmers in Lanes 1 and 6 to swim in newly created Heat 1A with your left-out swimmer and everybody's happy again.

But, don't you think it may be time to talk to the clerk of the course? Remember your leadership role. This is not the time to yell, scream, rant and rave and generally read the clerk the "riot act." You may

suddenly find yourself *without* a clerk of the course. This is the time, instead, to say "What can we do to keep these errors from happening again?" From your own experience, you'll probably be able to deduce why the mistakes were made and suggest some safeguards to prevent them.

Same meet, honest, but several events later. *Haven't you ever had one of those "nightmare" meets?* It is an 8 & under, 25 yard event. The off-duty starter is at the finish end, using the starting mike to alert the timers. He inadvertently activates the recall signal when the heat has about 10 yards to go. Some of the swimmers sort of look up to see what happened, but you know how hard it is to stop 8 & unders, they all finish the race. Unfortunately, half of the lane timers, having heard the recall, don't push their buttons or stop their watches. Others do, now what?

I can guarantee that by this time, at least 4 irate coaches have descended on the referee, ready to do battle! Don't hesitate. In your very calmest voice, have the announcer ask that all swimmers that were in that heat, and their coaches, meet you off the deck in a corner of the pool. Hopefully, you have another referee who can take over getting the next heat in the water while you resolve the issue. When everyone has assembled, tell them which lanes have valid times and which do not and, since you don't actually know how much each swimmer was affected, give them all the same opportunity. They may reswim the heat or retain the time they had in the original heat (if they had one). Make it clear that IF they reswim the heat, only the reswim time will count.

This gives each swimmer, and his coach, the chance to confer and make their own decision and you will have resolved the problem before it resulted in a protest.

The swimmers are finally off to a fair start but don't think it's time to relax. Watch the pool! During a race always be aware of what's going on in and around the pool. Are your stroke & turn judges positioned correctly for the stroke being watched? Is anything unusual happening with one of the swimmers? (Have you ever come to the end of a race and realized you were missing a swimmer? Usually, it's because they decided to quit and climb out at the other end, but you sure feel foolish if you haven't seen it.) Watch to make sure the timers are alert and coming up to the finish at the right time. In a distance race, I always keep track of all the swimmers at each turn, then if the timers don't realize the swimmer is finishing, I can have the starter alert them in time. We just did a Master's National meet last week and when you have swimmers ranging from 50 to 90 in a heat of 1650's, you know how important it is to know what lap each of them is on!

While watching the pool, remember that if you decide to call an infraction that you personally observe, you have to raise your hand too! Which brings us to a rather "ticklish" question — under what conditions would you, as the referee, call a stroke or turn infraction?

In answer to that question, I can only give you my philosophy: Assuming that the deck was uniformly covered by stroke & turn judges of equal competence, I, as the referee, would only call flagrant violations that were missed by the stroke or turn judge. The type that can be seen from anywhere around the pool in any lane, like the swimmer who starts freestyle in a butterfly or breaststroke event or the I.M.'er who does the strokes in the wrong order. The rule book tells us that "The referee shall insure that all swimmers shall have fair, equitable, and uniform conditions of judging" (102.15.5 Jurisdiction of Stroke and Turn Judges). If, as referee, I called EVERY infraction that I saw right under my nose in the lanes next to me, I would be subjecting those lanes to double the stroke & turn coverage that the other side of the pool had, certainly not a fair or *uniform* condition of judging.

To maintain that "fair and uniform" judging, OBSERVE THE WAY YOUR DECK OFFICIALS ARE DOING THEIR JOB! Are they competent and conscientious? Could you wholeheartedly vouch for

their actions and decisions, you may be asked to! If you could not, don't hesitate to tactfully and patiently offer constructive criticism and instruction. BUT, if the official is still not doing an adequate job, he must be replaced! If your only choice is between "bruising someone's ego" or allowing an incompetent official to remain on the deck, your decision must be based on what's best for the competitors.

Another ticklish question — if you find one judge is writing all or nearly all of the disqualifications, watch the pool and find out why. If you think the calls being made are incorrect (maybe this judge wasn't at the backstroke briefing!), you must over-rule them and re-instruct or remove the official. BUT, as is more likely, if you find this is actually your most competent judge and the other judges are NOT calling some of the infractions they should be, you have a more difficult situation.

Do you have enough people to replace the other stroke & turns? Can you rearrange your assignments to put someone of equal ability on the other half of the pool to "balance the deck?" If you can't, you may have to replace that one really competent judge and have him or her work with each of the other judges in turn to raise their level of competence. "Balancing the deck" can be one of your most difficult problems as a referee, particularly if you are short of officials. Whatever your solution to this problem, if it provides "fair, equitable and uniform conditions of judging," it will probably be right.

By the way, that brings me to another difference that I have found in various parts of the country. Some areas do not give the DQ slips to the referee before they go into the desk and other areas do not use DQ slips at all. Sections 102.15.3 and .4 do require that stroke or turn judges "shall report any violations to the referee on signed slips detailing the event, the heat number, the lane number, the swimmer's name and the infraction." If, as the referee, you do not see each disqualification, how are you going to know if your deck is balanced and if the stroke & turn judges are doing their job properly? (I once got a slip from what I thought was an experienced stroke & turn who disqualified a swimmer because he started out breaststroke in a freestyle event and then switched to freestyle!) For the swimmers' sakes, review all DQ's before confirming them.

Everything seems to be going fine. You're running a 10 & under event when suddenly, and this has probably happened to you too, a cute little 5-year old pops up at your elbow and says "somebody just swam in my lane!" Oops! Well, at least her coach must have told her who to talk to! You quickly have your announcer ask that the "swimmer who just swam in Heat 2, Lane 5, please report to the referee." The swimmer appears. This one is a 10-year old who was supposed to have swum in Heat 7 (unfortunately the clerk of course's 7 looked like a 2!). Do you subject the 5-year old to swimming in Heat 7 with the fastest 10-year olds? Do you disqualify the swimmer who swam in Heat 2 by mistake? I hope you know the answer to both of those questions is — No! In the case of the 5-year old, you'll again pull the swimmers from Lanes 1 and 6 (or 1 and 8 in an 8-lane pool) in Heat 3 and create a Heat 2A so she can swim with her peers. The 10-year old is not disqualified because rule book Section 102.16.3B(1) says that it is the head lane timer's responsibility to determine "that the swimmer is in the correct lane, heat and event."

At this point, the announcer reminds the coaches that their relay cards are due in 15 minutes. Very often, this is when a coach comes up and says, "I only have three 11-12 boys, but I have a good 10-year old, he can 'swim up' in age in a relay, can't he?" The answer again is — No. Rule book Section 205.2.4 (I told you to read Section 2) says, "Participants must swim in their respective age brackets." If the event had originally been scheduled as a 12 & under relay, the 10-year old would have been eligible.

Most of the time, if you've done all the things we've talked about, you won't have any protests or arguments. BUT, remember Murphy's Law chances are you will at some time have to handle a protest, verbal or written.

Protests will usually start with a coach charging down the deck vehemently protesting some disqualification or you could be faced with an emotional and often tearful appeal by a swimmer and parent against your decision or that of another official. Be careful!

Did you know that studies have shown that our opinion of a person is formed in the first 10 to 15 seconds and that opinion influences our subsequent actions or judgments! Keep an open mind. Just because the coach yelled at you, don't make a snap judgment against him. Remember, you're the judge, not an adversary! Judges listen carefully to both sides of an argument, consider those arguments within the framework of any laws (or rules) that apply and only then do they reach a decision.

With the tearful swimmer, your first instinct is to react sympathetically and benevolently but your decision here too must be based on what happened and the rules that apply. No matter how outlandish the argument seems.

Let's talk a little bit about the referee's authority and responsibility for handling protests:

The irate coach complaining about a disqualification is the most common type of protest. Section 102.11.1 in the USA-S rule book says:

"Protests against the judgment decisions of starters, stroke, turn, place and relay take-off judges can only be considered by the referee and the referee's decision shall be final."

This is one reason I am not in favor of referees acting in the dual capacity of a stroke and turn judge at a meet. The referee's integrity as an appeals judge, not a participant, in stroke and turn judgment calls should be protected.

How about our coach who is protesting a stroke & turn call. How should that be handled? Off the deck with courtesy, patience and common sense. If the coach is really upset, allow him to calm down first. You can do this a couple of ways:

- (1) Let him talk, while you listen. Often this is all that is needed and you will find you can then discuss the matter calmly;
- (2) If that doesn't work, take him for a walk, still listening. (Assuming you have that second referee around to keep the meet going while you do this.);
- (3) If that doesn't work either, after hearing his arguments, tell him you will be glad to look into it and report back to him. This gives the coach a "cooling-off" period, and at the same time allows you time to consider the protest and check out the facts.

You'll notice that all three of those steps have one thing in common — listening. Think about your own feelings in a similar situation you're never quite as mad at the person who turns you down if you know they have seriously considered your opinions. Extend the same courtesy to protesters at a swim meet.

Now, let's get back to our protest. Do you have the authority to over-rule a judgment call? Yes. The referee always has the power to overrule an official on any infraction he personally observes (102.13.1).

If you didn't see the infraction, you should thoroughly investigate the disqualification and, only if a rule was incorrectly applied or it appears that a mistake was made, should you overrule it. How about videos? These days nearly every protest includes the statement "but I have a video that shows he didn't do it!" No video has any official standing at a USA Swimming meet!

One final admonition. Don't be trapped into upholding a decision only because your ego is on the line and you don't want to admit a mistake may have been made. You are not the most important person at a swim meet, neither are the coaches, the parents or the stroke & turn judges. The most important persons at a swim meet are the swimmers. ALL of them and decisions should always be made in the context of providing "fair and equitable conditions of competition" for them!

When you have made your decision regarding the protest, inform the coach. This is where your knowledge, experience and attitude all come together. Knowledge and experience give you the basis for making your judgment. Attitude allows you to render that judgment without making everybody angrier than they were to begin with!

Handling the protests and problems that arise at a swim meet can be a lonely process for the referee who has only his own knowledge and experience to rely on. If you have a really difficult problem or one where you need additional information, don't forget to use all of the resources you have at a meet.

For instance, what if the weather conditions at the meet become really bad — lightning, strong winds, or other conditions that could make it unsafe to continue. Section 102.8.4 B of the rule book allows the referee, in his sole discretion, to suspend a meet until conditions warrant continuance. It also says "the referee may cancel the meet or event, or postpone it to a future date or time, with the approval of the meet committee". Did you know that there is no definition for the "meet committee" in the blue pages of the rule book? I think that's a very fortunate oversight. This way, the referee can decide who the "meet committee" should be for any particular problem; selecting those people with the most expertise in the matter to be considered. In the case of canceling or postponing a meet, you would probably want to include representatives of the host club and those coaches who have swimmers entered in the meet. When people are allowed to participate in a decision, they are much less likely to protest it.

How about eligibility rules and protests. At a local meet, protests against the eligibility of a swimmer to compete would be handled under rule 102.11.2 under which that ambiguous "meet jury" decides whether the swimmer may compete under protest. National Championship rules provide for an Eligibility Jury (207.7.7) to whom protests may be submitted, accompanied by a \$50 fee. The fee is returned if the protest is upheld.

Protests arising from the competition itself are covered under Section 102.11.4. These must be made

within 30 minutes of the race and the rule says "if the protest is not resolved immediately, the protester shall at that time file a written protest with the chairman of the LSC, or his/her representative, having jurisdiction over the event." Now that rule doesn't tell you the best way to "resolve the protest immediately" so the referee, who can decide any issue not covered by the rules, can either handle the matter himself or borrow another committee from the National Championship rules, the Technical Jury.

This can be an invaluable tool, if there is no clear cut rule which applies to the protest. If you feel the problem requires more than one point of view and a consensus of opinions, convene a Technical Jury (207.7.8). Select at least one coach, one athlete and up to three other people (I personally prefer two coaches, one athlete, and two officials). Of course, be sure to pick people who have no stake in the matter and, if you can, people whom the protesting party respects. Let the jury consider all the circumstances and reach a decision. Usually the protester will accept the decision since you've given

him a fair hearing and you've managed to resolve the protest immediately with no further need for appeal.

Well, you'll be happy to know we've come to the end of our swim meet all problems and protests have been resolved and you can now breathe your sigh of relief. As you do, remember to thank all those members of your team who helped make your job easier and remember that any problems that you did have, and handled, added to your knowledge and experience. They have helped to make you a more competent and "professional" official.

Truly competent officials don't let their ego get in the way of doing a good job; truly competent officials are committed to learning the rules thoroughly and applying them fairly and consistently to all swimmers. They are never afraid to acknowledge a mistake if one has been made and they always give the benefit of any doubt to the swimmer.

A true professional learns his job well, constantly increases his knowledge through continuing education, learns from his experiences, uses his knowledge and experience wisely, and takes pride in a job well done! Under that criteria, we as officials, are true professionals and if we always keep that in mind we will gain the respect of parents and coaches and, most important, our swimmers will benefit greatly!