

Chief Judge Manual

Potomac Valley Swimming



Introduction

The role of the chief judge is one of the most intense and rewarding positions for a swim official. It is a position that requires a good knowledge of the USA Swimming rule book, good organizational, time-management, and communication skills, a calm demeanor, patience, the ability to be a team player, and the ability to mentor other officials. Mastering these attributes of a chief judge will ensure that meets you attend run more smoothly, help you grow as a swim official, and give you many of the skills needed as a deck referee. The goal of this manual is to help you grow into the role of a chief judge, supported by on-deck instruction.

In this manual, the roles and responsibilities of the chief judge from pre-meet preparation, on deck duties, and post-meet followup will be described. The role of a team lead chief judge will also be presented along with information about the differences in the role of the chief judge at national meets.

Becoming a Chief Judge

Newer officials may not know whether they are ready to take the next step in their swim official journey. Others feel that they have been ready for some time. Some are intimidated by the additional responsibility, speaking in front of a group, or using a radio. So, how do you know if becoming a chief judge is the right step for you? There is no simple answer to this question, but if you have any interest, you are encouraged to apply to a meet as an apprentice chief judge. Your mentor will be an experienced official who will answer your questions and give you helpful instruction.

Initial Certification

Effective February 1, 2024 the certification standards for all USA Swimming certifications have been made consistent across the country. USA Swimming considers chief judge to be an optional certification as not every LSC certifies chief judges. Potomac Valley has a strong chief judge history and encourages all interested officials to pursue certification at this position. [Complete details](#) are available on the PVS website. Briefly, certification requires 16 sessions as a certified stroke and turn judge, attendance at a chief judge clinic (or briefing of CJ duties), reading the Professional Chief Judge document, 4 apprentice sessions over at least 2 meets with a trainer, and an evaluation.

Maintaining Your Certification (Recertification)

Like all swim official certifications, you will need to renew your certification periodically. Requirements for recertification are detailed on the PVS website and are less demanding than initial certification. The USA Swimming standard for recertification requires working 16 sessions

every 3 years with at least 8 as a chief judge or referee and passing the recertification test every 3 years for the highest certification held.

The Role of the Chief Judge

The chief judge serves several extremely important roles on a swim deck.

- Intermediary between the deck referee and the stroke and turn officials - the “eyes and ears of the deck referee.”
- Mentor to the stroke and turn officials.
- Facilitator who ensures – to the extent possible – that the meet can be conducted smoothly and without interruption.

It is rare that the deck referee leaves the start area on the pool deck. Therefore, it is important that another official is responsible for many of the other aspects of a well-run meet. This responsibility falls to the chief judge.

The first of these responsibilities is interacting with stroke and turn officials when there is a potential disqualification. The chief judge will be positioned on deck so they can see the stroke and turn officials. When an infraction is signaled by a stroke and turn judge, typically by a raised hand, the chief judge will approach the official and gather the necessary information via a series of questions. This process will be described in detail later. This process culminates in a recommendation to the deck referee as to whether the call is recommended for acceptance or if further discussion is required. As a stroke and turn judge, you are likely very familiar with this process.

The second responsibility of the chief judge is as a mentor to the stroke and turn officials. You will be called upon to observe, instruct, and correct aspects of protocol (the procedures for how stroke and turn officials move on the deck) and to answer questions about the rules. Opportunities for mentoring on the swim deck abound, and it is common for chief judges to offer additional instruction on aspects of protocol (especially when walking stroke) as well as offering additional insight into the meaning and interpretation of the rules of swimming. Remember that the stroke and turn officials on deck with you may not be as experienced as you. Every meet is an opportunity for personal improvement as well as an opportunity for improving fellow officials through mentoring. This process requires a careful and respectful approach and is best done in a positive and constructive manner.

The third responsibility is to ensure that the meet runs smoothly, to the extent that this is possible and within your domain. The chief judge is one of the busiest officials on deck at a swim meet. A good chief judge will anticipate needs and ensure that these are met before they cause a delay in a meet or have an impact on an athlete. Common examples include

- Preparing lap counters for distance events. This includes checking to make sure that the lap counter is not missing any numbers and that it is in position before the first heat of the

event. It may also involve keeping a spare lap counter with the correct lap count in case it is needed, and observing that the laps are properly counted.

- Preparing relay takeoff slips and assigning officials to this role prior to the beginning of the session.
- Alerting the deck referee (as appropriate) to any safety issues and any issues that may impact swimmers while in the water. Examples are a cap in the water, an athlete who has lost goggles and wants to retrieve them, a loose block or lane line, or an issue with the starting wedge or backstroke ledge. Coaches may approach you with concerns – these should be relayed to the deck referee as appropriate.

This list is not comprehensive, and many additional aspects of the roles and responsibilities will be covered in this manual. It is important – at all times – to remember that the chief judge works for the deck referee (and ultimately the meet referee). Stay in your box. Be respectful to everyone on deck, especially the chain of command. Do not answer questions that are outside your domain of responsibility. Instead, refer these to the deck referee or meet referee.

First Steps

Below some practical advice is given for your first sessions as a chief judge apprentice. Many of these will become common practices that will apply to every swim meet you attend.

Preparation

There are a few items you will want to bring with you to make your job easier.

- clipboard
- headset (PVS will provide headsets, but many chief judges like to bring their own)
- pens and/or pencils
- an official's sign-in sheet
- relay takeoff slips (if needed, plus scissors and a stapler if needed)
- a copy of the USA Swimming Rule Book
- a copy of the meet announcement

Also, make sure you are properly attired. You are in a position where others will look to you to model appropriate behavior on deck.

Apprentice Sessions

During your apprenticeship, you will be paired with an experienced chief judge who will instruct you and observe as you carry out the duties of a chief judge. In many cases, this official will be beside you throughout the meet. However, there may be cases in which you will work separately on the deck.

An apprentice session is your opportunity to practice the required skills of a chief judge and to receive feedback on those skills. It is also your opportunity to ask questions about any aspect of swimming, especially as it pertains to the role of the chief judge. At the conclusion of each session as an apprentice, your mentor will sit with you and go through a list of expectations (these are found on the apprentice form), noting good performance and making recommendations for improvement.

Prior to the Meet

It is always a good idea to print a copy of the meet announcement and review it for important information that is relevant to your role at the swim meet. For example, knowing the events in a session is essential information for a chief judge who may need to prepare for distance events or for relays. Make sure to bring the meet announcement with you to the meet. Similarly a copy of the timeline may be useful.

Additionally, it may be helpful to bring a copy of the USA Swimming stroke and turn briefing in case you need to present the stroke briefing during the pre-session briefing.

You should bring a sign-in sheet to keep track of all of the officials in each session. Frequently this will be done by the meet referee, however. Use the sign-in sheet as the basis for your deck assignments.

Arrival

It is important to arrive at the pool early so that you are well prepared for the briefing and the start of the session. A good rule of thumb is to arrive 15–30 minutes prior to the start of warmups. Use this time to talk to your meet referee about protocol and any unique issues that may require your attention, and to coordinate responsibilities with the other chief judges as appropriate. There is always a lot to do to prepare for a session when you are a chief judge. The more you complete prior to the start of the session, the better prepared you will be to handle the unexpected.

Pre-Session Briefing

The briefing has several distinct components that should be addressed by one of the chief judges at each session.

- introductions
- MAAPP briefing
- assignments
- stroke briefing
- jurisdiction and protocol
- any additional communication that may be necessary

Remember to keep the briefing brief. Respect the time of your officials and endeavor to give them some time before the start of the session to go to the restroom, grab a water, talk to their athlete, etc. That said, make sure to cover each of the elements of the briefing appropriately.

Some briefings will be quick and easy. Others may threaten to devolve when someone in the meeting wants to discuss a fine point of a rule or present an unusual scenario. While these can be valuable discussions, they cannot be allowed to prevent you from conducting the full pre-session briefing in a timely fashion. It is the responsibility of the chief judge to ensure that the pre-session briefing runs smoothly and you may need to “table” a discussion to get things back on track.

If your stroke and turn judges will be receiving heat sheets, this is a good time to distribute them.

Introductions

Always remember the leadership hierarchy of the meet. Introduce the meet referee first (if they are at the briefing – this will not always be the case). Introduce the deck referee(s) next, remembering that at least one of them might be on deck invigilating. Finally, introduce the chief judges. If the meet referee enters the briefing room at any point during the briefing, stop, introduce them, and give them the opportunity to address the officials.

MAAPP Briefing

The Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Protocol (MAAPP) briefing is one of the most important parts of the pre-session briefing because of its relevance to athlete safety. This will typically be one of the shorter parts of the overall briefing. The MAAPP briefing consists of three key points.

- interactions with athletes need to be “observable and interruptible”
- no deck changing is permitted
- officials need to use the appropriate restrooms

Additionally, you should remind officials that the use of a cell phone or any other device capable of capturing photo/video is not permitted behind the blocks at all times.

Assignments

Assigning officials to the various positions on the deck can be straightforward or can be a bit messy if officials arrive late, don’t show up, etc. It can be helpful to use a deck assignment sheet for this purpose (bring a pencil so changes are easier!). You may be able to complete this step prior to the start of the briefing, but sometimes you will need to do this during the briefing due to late-breaking changes. It is always a good idea to confer with the meet referee prior to the briefing on their preferred configuration of officials on the deck. There is no “one way” to set up a deck, so be flexible and follow the direction of the meet referee. Delivering the assignments is straightforward and quick. It is important to take into account the level of experience of the officials on the deck and do your best to avoid situations in which the deck is “unbalanced,” e.g. having experienced

officials on one side of the deck and inexperienced officials on the other side of the deck making it more likely for a swimmer to be disqualified when swimming in certain lanes.

Most often, you will assign an official more than one lane, and typically no more than five lanes (with the exception of distance sessions where a minimal number of officials is permissible). On an eight-lane pool with six officials, you might give four of the officials a three-lane jurisdiction and the remaining two officials a two-lane jurisdiction in the center of the pool. When you have officials walking stroke, the ideal configuration is to have two officials on each side of the pool when staffing permits. When you do not have enough officials for ideal staffing, you might use one stroke judge on each side of the pool or assign fewer officials as turn judges so that you can have two officials walking stroke.

If staffing and pool configuration permit, you will want at least one official observing the 15m mark. Similarly, if you have a large number of stroke and turn officials, you have several options that may be appropriate depending on the type of meet. You can use relief “teams” to replace a large number of officials simultaneously, allowing you to place more officials on the deck in a meaningful way. For example, on an eight lane, short course pool with twelve stroke and turn officials, you can assign four officials to the start and turn ends of the pool and use the remaining four officials as a relief team. These four officials would then relieve all of the officials on the start end followed by all of the officials on the turn end. You will want to clearly state the duration of relief, typically 10–20 minutes depending on staffing and length of the session, as well as the expectation that every official will take their break when the relief official arrives in their lanes.

When you have particularly good staffing for the deck, you may consider assigning one or more reserve officials. These officials will position themselves on the deck, typically in the corners, and will replace an official who is signaling an infraction (or who needs to leave the deck for some other reason).

One additional consideration when making assignments involves assigning mentors for apprentice officials. It is best to approach a potential mentor (someone who has been certified more than one year) prior to the briefing, make sure they are comfortable with the role of stroke and turn mentor, and ask them where they would prefer to be placed on the deck.

If there are relays during the session, you may need to assign stroke and turn judges for these tasks. This is also a good time to distribute relay takeoff slips. Make sure these are clearly labeled so there is no confusion as to where the official will be positioned to observe relay takeoffs. It is common practice to use the meet referee, an off deck referee, and starter(s) as relay takeoff judges. Make sure to check with the meet referee before making these assignments. In the case of medley relays, it is likely that you will have no other choice but to use these officials. Chief judges may also serve as relay takeoff judges.

You will also want to assign chief judges to various parts of the pool. Where these chief judges are placed will vary depending on the number of chief judges and the type of meet. Here are some scenarios and possible assignments.

- five chief judges – use one chief judge in each corner and the remaining chief judge as relief for the other four chief judges (this is common at higher-level meets)
- four chief judges – use one chief judge in each corner
- three chief judges – use two chief judges on the start end (on opposite corners) and one chief judge on the turn end. This arrangement is especially when athlete notification is part of the meet protocol.
- two chief judges – use one chief judge on each end of the pool
- one chief judge – position on the start end opposite the start area

Stroke Briefing

The stroke briefing is a very important part of the pre-session briefing process. Best practice is to keep this briefing short and stick to the USA Swimming briefing. This briefing is likely to generate a few questions, so be prepared to answer these or defer to the meet referee or a deck referee if you are not certain about the answer.

Jurisdiction and Protocol Briefing

Depending on the meet, this briefing may be quite short, very involved, or somewhere in between. The description of jurisdiction tends to be quite simple and can be delivered in a few sentences. The level of detail needed in the protocol briefing will vary depending on the type of meet. In a meet where stroke and turn officials are not walking stroke, the protocol tends to be quite simple. At meets where stroke and turn officials will be walking stroke, the protocol briefing needs to be more detailed and must cover the specifics of all events in the session. At championship-level meets, the protocol briefing can be quite involved. In all cases, it is important to clearly explain the protocol to all of the officials in the briefing without unnecessarily extending the length of the meeting.

If there are relay events in the session, it is important to clearly state the protocol for observing the relay takeoff, i.e. watch the feet of the departing swimmer, and once they are no longer in contact with the block look down to make sure the touch has been made.

Instruct officials on where to stand on the turn ends of the pool and when to step to the edge and when to step back (typically when swimmers enter/exit their jurisdiction). Officials should stand straight with their hands behind their back or comfortably at their side, with one foot slightly ahead of the other (to help maintain balance).

At meets where stroke and turn officials receive a heat sheet, it is appropriate to remind them that it should remain in their pocket except when making a notation. This is part of maintaining a professional appearance when on deck. However, there is room for a variety of options. Similarly,

when officials are seated, they should have both feet on the floor, not tucked under the chair and should not cross their legs. Additionally, officials should not discuss infractions on the deck, in hospitality, or in any other place where they can be overheard by a swimmer, coach, parent, etc.

At finals sessions, it is appropriate to brief officials to smile and clap for all swimmers as they are introduced or when a record is broken.

Concluding the Pre-Session Briefing

Make sure to give your officials any last-minute details and clearly state what time they are expected to be on deck and in position. After you dismiss the officials, stick around to answer any questions that were not resolved during the briefing.

On Deck

Having concluded the pre-session briefing, you should head to the deck and prepare for the start of the session. Hopefully you have handled the big items by this point and are just waiting for officials to get into position, etc. Make sure you have DQ slips and any other necessary items.

About 10–15 minutes prior to the start of the session, conduct a test of the radios being used at the meet. (Radios and headsets will be provided with the equipment for the meet.) Start with the meet referee, then proceed to the admin referee (if they are using a radio), then the deck referee(s), and finally the chief judges. You may simply say “(official’s name), radio check” and listen for them to respond. If they do not respond, make a note and move to the next official on the list. At the end of the radio roll call, check again with officials who did not respond during the first radio call. If they still do not respond, find them and see if their radio is turned on, if their headset is working, etc. Work with them to ensure they have a functional radio for the session.

By now, you are probably close to the start of the session. Move to your position on the pool deck and look for your stroke and turn officials. When all of the officials in your part of the pool are in place, radio the deck referee appropriately, e.g. “turn end officials are in position” or “stroke judges, lane 1 side, in position.” The referee should respond with “thank you.”

Your position on deck will vary with the layout of the pool and the positioning of the stroke and turn officials. When you have officials walking stroke, your positioning will be most different from other scenarios. Make sure that you are in a position where you can see all of the officials in your part of the pool (this could be a quadrant, a half, or even the entire pool).

Once the session begins, your job is to watch all of the stroke and turn officials on the deck, with particular attention paid to the officials in your part of the pool. You are primarily watching for these officials to raise their hand indicating a possible disqualification. Of course, many other things may happen on deck that require your attention, so always keep an eye on the pool and use your radio to communicate when necessary.

One important task is to assist the deck referee with reseeding swimmers when requested. This may involve walking the athlete to the blocks and providing their name to the timers. You may also be asked to complete a reseed form. Make sure to return this to the deck referee for their signature and so they can return the form to the admin official so it is properly recorded.

When a hand is raised, move immediately to the official (unless you are in the midst of working on another call). While you are moving toward the official, use your radio to inform the deck referee and the other chief judges of the possibility of a disqualification, e.g. “possible disqualification, start end, lanes 3 and 4.” (Make sure that you are not talking on the radio during the start of a heat, i.e. after the short whistles and before the start signal has sounded, and that you are not talking over anyone else on the radio.) When you arrive at the official who signaled a disqualification, your first question will be “what lane?” Immediately radio this information (except as noted above) by saying, e.g. “lane 3.”

Having advised the deck staff of the possible disqualification, it is time to discuss what the stroke and turn judge said. You have been through this procedure many times as a stroke and turn judge, and hopefully the process has been consistent and performed well. Ask the official what they saw. Make sure that it is clear that the infraction occurred in their jurisdiction. Listen to what the official has to say. Do not ask them leading questions to get the answer you expect. The official may or may not use the language of the rule book, be clear on the call, etc. It is your job to understand what they saw and determine whether you believe an infraction occurred. It is a best practice to ask an additional question or two to get a clear and complete picture of how the swimmer violated a rule. For example, if the official indicates that a swimmer made a non-simultaneous touch, you may ask when the infraction occurred (which turn?), which hand touched first, or how far apart the hands were. You will want to make some notes on your heat sheet (and possibly a DQ slip) about the infraction.

With this information in hand, you are most likely ready to call in to the deck referee. First, check to make sure that there is enough time to contact the deck referee before the start of the next heat. If there is not enough time, wait until after the next start. Next, take a few seconds to review the information on the infraction. You want to be clear and concise on the radio, always speaking in the language of the rule book. Now, press the button on your headset to transmit, wait for half a second, and give the following information, speaking clearly and distinctly

- event, heat, and lane number
- the infraction, using rulebook language
- your recommendation (accept, discussion)

It is important to follow this procedure consistently as it is what the deck referee expects to hear, making it easier to process calls even in difficult (i.e. loud) environments. Always begin by giving the event, heat, and lane number so the deck referee can make the appropriate notes on the call. Next, state the infraction using rulebook language. If you aren't sure of the precise rulebook language, the deck referee should correct the language when they reply. It is best to be concise, but

it is ok to include a small amount of additional information, e.g. “non-simultaneous touch, left then right.” Your radio call concludes with a *recommendation*. Chief judges do not accept calls – this is the job of the deck referee – they make recommendations. If you are comfortable with the call as described to you by the stroke and turn judge, then it is appropriate to state “recommend acceptance.” If you are not comfortable with the call, the appropriate language is “recommend discussion.”

How do you know whether to recommend a call? Viability of a call is determined by whether the violation occurred in the Judge’s assigned jurisdiction, whether their description is accurate, clear, and confident, and whether the swimmer’s actions were indeed a violation of the rules.

At this point the deck referee will reply to your radio call. They should repeat the event, heat, and lane, and the infraction. If the deck referee is satisfied with the call, they will conclude with “call accepted.” Otherwise they may ask you to come to the start area for additional discussion.

In some cases, during your discussion with the stroke and turn official, they will change their mind about the infraction, essentially withdrawing the call. In this case it is appropriate to call over the radio with the event, heat, and lane numbers followed by “no call” or “the judge has rescinded the call.”

Assuming that the call is accepted it is time to write (or complete) the DQ slip. An example of a current DQ slip is shown on the next page. Fill out the top line with the event, heat, and lane numbers, and the second line with the swimmer’s name (frequently last name and first initial). Now use check marks to indicate the infraction on the appropriate portion of the slip. It is a best practice not to include additional written information (e.g. turn number, which hand) on the DQ slip as this can cause problems during discussion with a coach. However, note that some deck referees will ask you to do this and that it is appropriate to follow their direction. Make sure to check the completed DQ slip for accuracy.

Once you have completed the slip, return to the official who made the call, show them the slip (and perhaps briefly summarize the call), and get them to print their name on the appropriate line at the bottom of the slip. You should put your initials on the same line to the right of the official’s name. At this time, you should take the DQ slip to the deck referee. (During a busy session, you might take several calls before you have a chance to take the slips to the deck referee.) Remember that the deck referee needs to review the DQ slip and give it to the admin referee for processing and that an event cannot be closed until all DQs called over the radio have been received, so it is important to complete radio calls and DQ slips quickly and accurately and get the DQ slips to the deck referee in a timely manner.

While our goal is to have all DQ reports filled out in a standard and consistent manner, failure to do so does not constitute automatic grounds for not approving or overturning an otherwise valid

disqualification. Referees should continue to use their best judgment and common sense when processing a disqualification report.

As soon as the slip has been given to the deck referee, return to your position and resume watching your officials. While you are working through this process, the other chief judges and the deck referee will be watching for possible infractions and will call these over the radio in the appropriate manner. Make sure to listen to see if there is another call in your jurisdiction. If one chief judge is taking a large number of calls, it is appropriate for another chief judge to help by processing other calls in that area of the pool.

Throughout this process, there are a number of opportunities for mentoring. Perhaps your stroke and turn judge was unclear with their description of the call or were not able to recall correct rulebook language. In these instances, it may be appropriate to mentor the official by giving them the proper language. If they withdraw a call, it may be appropriate to discuss the call with them during a break or after the session. Whenever you are working with a stroke and turn official, always remember to be friendly and supportive. The goal of mentoring is to help the official improve some aspect of officiating. Keeping in mind that they are a volunteer official, make sure that the manner in which you approach them is always constructive. Knowing when and how to mentor an official appropriately takes some time and



DISQUALIFICATION REPORT

EVENT# _____ HEAT _____ LANE _____

SWIMMER _____ TEAM _____

BUTTERFLY START _____ SWIM _____ TURN _____ FINISH _____

KICK: ALTERNATING (1A) _____ BREAST (1B) _____ SCISSORS (1C) _____

ARMS: NON-SIMULTANEOUS (1E) _____ UNDERWATER RECOVERY (1F) _____

TOUCH: ONE HAND (1J) _____ NOT SEPARATED (1H) _____
NON-SIMULTANEOUS (1L) _____ NO TOUCH (1K) _____

NOT TOWARD THE BREAST OFF WALL (1M) _____

HEAD DID NOT BREAK SURFACE BY 15m (1N) _____ RE-SUBMERGED (1R) _____

OTHER (1T): _____

BACKSTROKE START _____ SWIM _____ TURN _____ FINISH _____

NO TOUCH AT TURN (2I) # _____

PAST VERTICAL AT TURN:

DELAY INITIATING ARM PULL (2S) _____ DELAY INITIATING TURN (2T) _____

MULTIPLE STROKES (2U) _____

TOES OVER LIP OF GUTTER AFTER THE START (2P) _____

HEAD DID NOT BREAK SURFACE BY 15m (2N) _____ RE-SUBMERGED (2R) _____

NOT ON BACK OFF WALL (2K) _____

SHOULDERS PAST VERTICAL TOWARDS THE BREAST (2L) _____

OTHER (2T): _____

BREASTSTROKE START _____ SWIM _____ TURN _____ FINISH _____

KICK: ALTERNATING (3A) _____ BUTTERFLY (3C) _____ SCISSORS (3D) _____

ARMS: PAST HIPLINE (3E) _____ NON-SIMULTANEOUS (3F) _____

TWO STROKES UNDER (3G) _____ NOT IN SAME HORIZONTAL PLANE (3H) _____

ELBOWS RECOVERED OVER WATER (3I) _____

TOUCH: ONE HAND (3J) _____ NOT SEPARATED (3N) _____

NON-SIMULTANEOUS (3L) _____ NO TOUCH (3K) _____

NOT TOWARD THE BREAST OFF WALL (3M) _____

CYCLE: KICK BEFORE PULL (3Q) _____ HEAD NOT UP (3P) _____

DOUBLE PULLS/KICKS (3S) _____

OTHER (3T): _____

FREESTYLE

NO TOUCH AT TURN (4K) # _____

HEAD DID NOT BREAK SURFACE BY 15m (4N) _____ RE-SUBMERGED (4C) _____

INDIVIDUAL MEDLEY

STROKE INFRACTION(S) # _____ OUT OF SEQUENCE (5P) _____

FOURTH DISTANCE SWUM IN STYLE OF PREVIOUS STROKE _____

RELAYS

STROKE INFRACTION: (61-64) # _____ SWIMMER # _____

EARLY TAKE OFF SWIMMER (66-68) # _____

CHANGED ORDER (6P): SWIMMER _____ STROKE _____

OTHER (6T): _____

MISCELLANEOUS

FALSE START (7O) _____ DECLARED FALSE START (7P) _____

DID NOT FINISH (7Q) _____ DELAY OF MEET (7R) _____

OTHER (7S-Z): _____

JUDGE: _____

(print name clearly)

REFEREE: _____

(print name clearly)

NOTIFIED: _____ SWIMMER _____ COACH _____

rev. (7/19)

SWIMMER/COACH

practice, but is very effective when done well and is almost always appreciated by the official.

During some meets, it is the job of the chief judge to notify a swimmer that they were disqualified during the heat. This is one reason why we always call in the lane number before taking a call (even if notification of athletes is not part of the meet). Another reason is that the lane number is a critical part of ensuring that the DQ is assigned correctly – it is easy to get a lane number wrong in the middle of a busy meet. If you are a chief judge working on the turn end of the pool, you will want to move to the lane number indicated and listen for further information. When the call is adjudicated by the deck referee, take note of the infraction, making sure that the call has been accepted. Once accepted, it is appropriate to notify the athlete. To do this, when the athlete exits the pool, ask them to step back with you for a moment. Explain to them that they were disqualified during the heat and tell them the reason. It is a good idea to advise them to tell their coach who can talk to the deck referee for additional information. Do not keep an athlete waiting too long – let them know that someone will get in touch with their coach if the DQ is upheld and release them.

In the case that a coach challenges a call, the deck referee may come to you for additional information (and may speak to the stroke and turn judge who made the call as well). This is why you need to take notes on each infraction on your heat sheet. Remember that care must be taken when talking about an infraction on deck, especially when a swimmer, coach, or parent may overhear. Always refer anyone asking about a DQ to the deck referee.

Throughout the session, keep an eye on your officials, making sure they are in the proper position for each event (it is not uncommon for stroke and turn officials to forget to move to the corners of the pool for a freestyle event) and making sure they are observing protocol correctly. Make any corrections as necessary, always using the “mentoring approach.”

If there is a distance event in the session, make sure that you have placed the lap counters in each lane prior to the start of the event, and that you pick them up after the event has concluded. It is a courtesy to the swimmers to also put a kickboard in each lane for them to kneel on while counting laps. You may work with pool staff to get enough lap counters and kickboards for each lane in the pool.

Relay Takeoff

If there are relays, you will need to check relay takeoff slips after the last swimmer in the last leg in the slowest lane has left the blocks. We frequently use two officials to look at half of the lanes of the pool, positioned opposite one another. For example, in an 8-lane pool, we might position a relay takeoff judge on the lane 1 side of the pool to judge takeoffs in lanes 1–4, with their counterpart positioned between lanes 4 and 5, looking toward lane 1, to judge the same lanes. The other two judges would observe lanes 5–8 in the same manner.

A relay takeoff violation requires independent observation of the same infraction by two officials. To relay information on relay takeoffs to the deck referee, a chief judge needs to observe the relay takeoff slip of one of the judges. If there are no infractions indicated (e.g. no “X” marks on the

slip), then the chief judge should radio the deck referee saying, “lanes 1 through 4 clear.” In the event that an early relay takeoff is indicated, the chief judge should radio the deck referee saying, “possible early takeoff violation, event __, heat __, lane __, swimmer __.” The chief judge should then move to the other relay takeoff official and inspect their relay takeoff slip. If the same infraction is indicated on both slips, radio the deck referee saying, “possible relay takeoff violation, event __, heat __, lane __, swimmer __, recommend accept.” If the slips do not agree, radio the deck referee stating, “lanes 1 through 4 clear.”

Dismissal

At the conclusion of the session, you should wait for the deck referee to give permission for the officials to be dismissed from the deck. At some meets, it may be necessary to resolve a tie or some other matter before the officials can be dismissed.

Post-Session Duties

A chief judge has a few duties left after the stroke and turn officials have been dismissed. Make sure that the following items have been addressed

- timer clipboards, watches, and pencils have been collected
- heat sheets from the stroke and turn judges have been collected (if appropriate) and returned to the admin referee
- heat sheet from all of the chief judges have been returned (if appropriate) to the admin referee

Radio Protocol

Some aspects of radio protocol have been discussed above. In this section, an overview of proper radio protocol is given here. Note that radio protocol will vary from place to place and from meet to meet. However, the protocol given here is a good guide for what you will encounter on most decks.

Disqualification for Stroke Violation

This is the most common radio protocol that a chief judge will use, and several examples have been presented above. The outline of the protocol will be something like the following.

Stroke and Turn Judge raises hand

CJ begins moving to ST.

CJ: “Possible disqualification, (start end/turn end/stroke), lane(s) __ – __”

DR: May respond with “acknowledged.”

CJ reaches ST.

CJ: "Lane __"

CJ gets details of DQ.

CJ: "Possible disqualification, event __, heat __, lane __, (states infraction using rulebook language), (recommend accept/recommend discussion/no call).

DR: "Event __, heat __, lane __, (repeats infraction using rulebook language), (that call is accepted/requests additional information/please come see me)."

CJ takes DQ slip to deck referee.

If swimmers are being notified of disqualifications (this may involve a different chief judge).

CJ: "Event __, heat __, lane __, swimmer notified."

Disqualification for False Start

In the case of a false start, the CJ may be tasked with writing the DQ slip. Since this call requires confirmation by the starter and deck referee and there is no raised hand, the deck referee will initiate the radio call. The DQ will usually be written by the start area chief judge.

DR: "Event __, heat __, lane __, confirmed false start."

CJ fills out DQ slip and gives it to the starter.

If swimmers are being notified of disqualifications.

CJ: "Event __, heat __, lane __, swimmer notified."

Relay Takeoff

A chief judge will always contact the deck referee to advise them that the relay takeoff slips have been reviewed. This conversation is initiated by the chief judge.

CJ checks the relay takeoff slip of one of the two judges.

CJ: "Lanes __-__, clear."

-or-

"Possible early takeoff violation, event __, heat __, lane __, swimmer __."

CJ checks relay takeoff slip of the other judge.

CJ: "Lanes __-__, clear."

-or-

"Possible early takeoff violation, event __, heat __, lane __, swimmer __, recommend acceptance."

All lanes clear, DR: "Relay takeoff, all lanes clear."

Early takeoff, DR: "Event __, heat __, lane __, early takeoff swimmer __, that call is accepted."

If swimmers are being notified of disqualifications.

CJ: “Event __, heat __, lane __, swimmers notified.”

PVS Radios

In Potomac Valley Swimming, we use Midland GXT1000 radios on frequencies 3-44 or 4-37. There are a number of different styles of headset that are compatible with these radios. Radios (and sometimes headsets) may be provided at PVS meets. However, many officials choose to purchase their own headsets (these are available from a number of online retailers) and a few purchase their own radios. Note that headsets are generally specific to a particular manufacturer or type of radio from that manufacturer and are not likely to be compatible with other radios. (Similarly, getting radios from different manufacturers to communicate on the same channel is problematic.) Although these issues do not present any real difficulties within the LSC, they will be present at national meets and meets in other LSCs.



Some General Advice on Communicating via Radio

Communicating clearly over a radio can be a challenge at a swim meet, primarily due to noise levels. There are some things you can do to ensure that you use your radio in the most effective way possible. First, make sure to pause briefly after pressing the “push to talk” button on your headset to avoid having the first part of your communication cut off. Also make sure to release the button only after you have finished speaking. Hold the microphone approximately 6 inches from your mouth and speak clearly and distinctly. Holding the microphone closer to your mouth, attempting to block sound using a clipboard, or yelling will most often *decrease* the clarity of your radio communication.

Headsets come in a variety of styles, and you may find that a particular style works better than others. One common style is the “audio headphone” style with a speaker that sits close to one ear and is held in place via a band placed over or behind the head. Another common style has the speaker connected to an internal earpiece via an “air tube.” This style of earpiece generally blocks a considerable amount of ambient noise in one ear by design. Note that this setup is compatible with custom molded earpieces which can further enhance sound quality.

Extended conversations concerning the details of a disqualification should not take place over the radio. If additional information is needed beyond that which can be briefly communicated, the deck referee should have another referee step in and should then confer with the chief judge.

Start Area Chief Judge

The start area of the pool is located on either side of the start end of the pool and is where the starter and deck referee will be positioned. At some meets, a chief judge is assigned to the start area and given additional duties. Some of these duties are particularly important at championship and other national meets. These duties include

- taking declared false starts from swimmers or coaches and relaying the information to the deck referee
- checking in and keeping track of alternate swimmers for finals events
- writing DQ slips for false starts

When taking declared false starts (DFS) or working with alternates for finals, it is important that the start area chief judge stays in the start area as much as possible. The other chief judge positioned on the start end should take additional responsibility for processing potential disqualifications and for notification of athletes to afford the start area chief judge the ability to remain available to athletes and coaches.

Team Lead Chief Judge

At championship meets and at all national meets, you can expect for one chief judge to be selected as the team lead. This person will work with the meet referee, the head starter, the head deck referee (if there is one), and the lead administrative official to coordinate protocols and procedures for the meet. They will serve as the leader of the chief judge team, assigning various duties to the chief judges. The team lead chief judge frequently writes the deck protocol for the stroke and turn judges (at the direction of the meet referee) and is in charge of all of the pre-session stroke and turn briefings. The team lead chief judge is often in charge of entering officials into the Official Tracking System (OTS) and ensuring that each officials' certifications are current so that they are able to serve on deck.

Declared False Starts

It is important to understand the use of the declared false start at a swim meet. This is a frequently misunderstood part of a swim meet. The declared false start, or DFS, is the opportunity for a swimmer to avoid a penalty for a no-show during prelims of a timed finals session. This can be either at a timed finals session with positive check-in or a prelims finals that uses the national scratch protocol.) To declare a false start, the athlete or their coach simply needs to give this information to admin, the meet referee, a deck referee, or a chief judge prior to the start of the heat in which they are scheduled to compete (the appropriate officials to whom a DFS may be given can vary depending on the meet procedures). Note that an athlete may still swim if they DFS by simply showing up at the blocks and starting the race. If they do not swim the race, then the DFS becomes a DQ for the event.

Prelims/Finals Meets

Prelims/finals meets are contested with prelims swim in an earlier session (prelims) that qualifies swimmers for a final session. Often, but not always, these meets are championship- or national-level meets. As such, there is a greater expectation of professionalism on the part of all officials.

Time Trials

Occasionally within the LSC and more commonly at higher-level meets, there are time trials events, either as part of the meet, or as part of a separate meet contested immediately following a session of the meet (typically prelims). Time trials are an opportunity for swimmers to get a qualifying time for another meet or to participate in an event that they were otherwise unable to swim. Time trials need to be staffed just like other meets, although it may be permissible to use fewer stroke and turn judges.

Other Duties

- At some meets, especially higher-level meets, it is appropriate to dry the chairs of the stroke and turn officials or make sure that they are provided with a towel for this purpose.
- When stroke and turn judges are not given heat sheets, make sure to keep them updated about upcoming events.
- Frequently a chief judge will organize chairs on the deck for the stroke and turn officials.
- At some meets, typically some championship and most national meets, a bell is placed in each lane by a chief judge prior to the first event of a distance event so that a bell may be rung for each swimmer competing in each heat. The bells are collected after the final heat of the distance event. It is not common to ring more than one bell at an LSC meet, and in this case it is the responsibility of the starter to bring a bell and to ring it appropriately.
- A chief judge should ensure that DQ slips are available prior to the start of the session.
- In sessions with distance events, it may be appropriate to place a lap counting sheet on a timer clipboard or provide these to stroke and turn judges.

Resources

- USA Swimming's excellent overview of the position: [The "Professional" Chief Judge -or- Assistant and Mentor to All Officials](#)
- USA Swimming national certification requirements: [The Professional Chief Judge](#)
- PVS [training materials](#).