

## The Stroke Judge

Stroke judges walk on the sides of the pool and observe the swimmers. Depending on staffing, you may see one judge or two judges on each side of the pool. With one stroke judge on each side, he/she typically starts close to the 15-meter mark during backstroke, butterfly and freestyle to observe where the swimmer surfaces. Since breaststroke has no 15m rule, the judge starts just past the backstroke flags. As always, specific procedures may be altered by the Meet Referee. The strokes are best judged by walking abreast of or slightly behind the swimmers. If the field starts to spread out, the judge should try to maintain a position where he/she can equitably observe all swimmers in the jurisdiction. Great care must be taken to ensure that the inside lanes are observed and judged equally to the outside lanes which are closer and usually easier to see.

Lead/lag judging uses four stroke judges, two judges walking on each side of the pool. When there are sufficient judges, this method provides more consistent observation of all swimmers. In a typical wall-to-wall jurisdiction, the lead judge normally starts at the 15m mark while the lag judge is positioned between the 15m mark and the start end. As the heat begins, the lag judge watches the initial strokes and kicks while the lead judge observes that the swimmers conform to the 15m rule (except in breaststroke). Once the swimmers have all passed the 15m mark, both judges follow them down the course, observing strokes and kicks. As the swimmers separate, the two judges likewise separate to maintain balanced observation, typically with lead judge focusing primarily on the lead swimmers in the jurisdiction while the lag judge observes the lag swimmers—typically two and two (assuming an eight-lane pool), but depending on how the swimmers separate it could be three and one. As the swimmers approach the turn end of the pool, the lag judge stops at the turn end's 15m mark while the lead judge continues the observation into the turn and the initial actions of the second leg of the race. As the swimmers head back toward the start end, the lag judge becomes lead and the lead judge becomes lag. This coordination continues until the race finishes. In any heat where there are just one or two swimmers in the jurisdiction, only one official will walk on that side and judge the heat.

Safety is always a priority when walking stroke. Typically there are swimmers and coaches along the side of the pool, and we necessarily share the space with them. A polite reminder or two is usually all it takes to clear the path for the stroke judge, and the Chief Judge can assist with this. Be aware of obstructions, slippery areas, and other peculiarities.

The configuration of many PVS short course pools precludes the use of stroke judges. But for long course and for those short course pools that can accommodate it, the use of stroke judges helps to ensure fair and equitable judging of our athletes.