

Maryland LSC Swimming

Chief Judge

We are all volunteers and our main focus is our athletes. In many cases, the athletes are also our children. Officiating should not be viewed as an obligation. Rather, we officiate because we enjoy what we do. Every official has interests, experiences and abilities suited to the various position required to staff a sanctioned swim meet. At no time should any person feel like they are just a stroke and turn official. Without the help of every official, the meet would not be totally successful. Every official who volunteers to work at our meets contributes to the level of professionalism and the quality of how we judge our athletes' swims. Maryland LSC officials who aspire to serve as a chief judge should be considered as a stroke and turn mentor.

Generally, officials who are asked or who request to be assigned as a chief judge are certified and experienced stroke and turn officials who have been officiating for at least one year. However, each person's level of experience, meets worked and interests will be a better indicator of when officials are ready to accept the challenges of the chief judge. A chief judge should be very knowledgeable of the rules and should be able to demonstrate a level of competency when describing a possible disqualification to the chief judge or deck referee. More importantly, the chief judge should have good people skills with the ability to train and support officials. When encouraging an official to follow the anticipated deck protocols or when a call is overturned, the chief judge should always be supportive and provide a reason for the needed change in a positive, constructive manner.

Oftentimes, officials will not know what position they will be assigned to work by the meet referee until they arrive to the pool. If an official is asked to serve as a chief judge, there are several duties that need to be addressed:

- 1) Establish when and where you want the officials to meet for the stroke briefing. Check with the meet referee first to see if there is a preferred area. Generally, the stroke briefing is held 45-60 minutes before the start of the session.
- 2) Greet each official and ask them to complete the sign-in sheet provided by your meet referee.
- 3) Introduce yourself and ask each official to introduce themselves to the group and tell what LSC and club they represent.
- 4) Give each official a heat sheet.
- 5) Conduct a stroke briefing. This may be a stressful moment, especially if you are conducting the briefing for your first time. The style of the briefing is determined by

- the chief judge. However, a very effective way to give a briefing is to “tell a story.” Give the briefing in IM order and tell what a legal stroke looks like throughout the swim. The deck referee may also want to add additional suggestions on deck protocol and rule interpretations.
- 6) Discuss the jurisdiction for the stroke and turn officials. This should be established with your meet referee before you start the briefing. Generally, the turn judges’ jurisdiction after the start is until the swimmers’ head breaks the surface of the water. At the turn, the official has from the initiation of the turning action for backstroke or the last stroke into the wall, the touch, the turning action and until the swimmers’ head breaks the surface of the water after the turn. At the finish, the jurisdiction is the last stroke into the wall and the touch. Stroke officials have “wall-to-wall” jurisdiction except they have the last kick into the wall. It can be too difficult to fairly judge a non-simultaneous or one hand touch when observing four lanes. If there are not enough officials to use stroke officials, the jurisdiction for the turn officials will be half way out. In some cases, the jurisdiction for turn officials may be from the backstroke flags going into the turn(s) and finish and until the swimmer head breaks the surface of the water after the turn(s) and the stroke officials may have “wall-to-wall” jurisdiction.
 - 7) Complete the stroke and turn deck assignments. If you have apprentice stroke and turn officials, try to assign them to your most experienced officials. Try to establish at least one relief position/person. The deck referee, administrative referee, and starter will be assigned by the meet referee.
 - 8) Discuss deck protocol. At the start of each heat, officials, timers and other swimmers should be behind the blocks so that the starter has a clear view of the swimmers on the blocks. When the swimmers leave the blocks at the start of the race, turn officials should move to the edge of the pool to observe the swimmers in their jurisdiction. At the turn and finish, officials should also be at the edge of the pool so that they have a clear view of the touch. An official who is standing back two feet from the edge of the pool at the turn or at the finish is not in a fair position to judge a non-simultaneous or one hand touch. During backstroke event, turn officials at the start end of the pool should move to the corner of the pool after the first long whistle that invites the swimmers into the water. If you are on the start side of the pool, be sure to stand behind the starter. You are observing swimmers’ toes after the start to make sure that a swimmer does not wrap their toes over the gutter or place their feet in the gutter. If a swimmer starts in an illegal position, this call should not be made by the turn official; only after the start.
 - 9) Use the briefing to show how a disqualification slip will be completed by the chief judge. There are four sections at the top of each stroke:

- The start should be checked when there is a confirmed DQ by the deck referee after the start and until the swimmer's head surfaces.
- The swim is checked when there is a confirmed DQ during the swim (after the swimmer's head surfaces and until the turning action of the backstroke or the initiation of the last stroke into the wall).
- The turn is checked when there is a confirmed DQ from the point the turn is initiated in the backstroke or the last stroke into the wall and until the swimmer's head surfaces after the turn.
- The finish is checked when there is a confirmed DQ for the last stroke into the wall and the finish touch.

After the deck referee confirms/accepts the chief judge's recommendation, the chief judge completes the DQ slip and presents the slip to the official who made the call for their review and acceptance of the DQ slip as completed. During this time, the chief judge may step in for the official while the official is reviewing and signing the DQ slip. While in the position for the official and the chief judge observes a possible disqualification, the chief judge is permitted to make the call. The official should **print** their name on the designated line and the chief judge who handled the call should initial to the right side of the official's printed name.

- 10) Ask or give each official a few DQ slips in the event that you need the official to complete their own slip if the deck becomes busy.
- 11) Establish how relief of the officials will be provided. This is generally done after 10 – 15 minutes, depending upon the number of officials assigned to the deck and the number of relief officials that are available. During freestyle events and with the permission of the meet referee, the touch at turns can be observed from the corners of the pool. Generally, stroke officials observe the 16.4 yards/15 meter mark for only the first 50 yards/100 meters of a freestyle event, especially when long distance events are being contested.
- 12) There may be relays and you will need to discuss how relay take-offs will be observed. For medley relays, you will most likely need to ask the off deck referee and starter and even the meet referee to assist with this task. If you aspire to work as a chief judge on a regular basis, keep a few relay take-off slips in your swim bag. You may be the only official with the forms. Give relay take-off slips (if available) to the turn judges who will be serving as lane judges as well as the other officials who may be assisting with relay take-offs as side judges. Discuss how the form is completed and how possible early take-offs are handled by the chief judge. Officials do not raise their hand if they have a possible early take-off. If the exchange was good, circle the corresponding swimmer's number (O means OK). If the side judge

- has an “X” on their take-off form, let the side judge official know that the chief judge will take the slip and then go to the lane judge to see if there is a corresponding early take-off. The lane judges should be informed that even though they may have an “X”, the chief judge will only come over to them if the side judge also has an “X” mark on the slip. If there is a confirmed early take-off, both officials will need to sign the DQ slip.
- 13) Ask the officials if they have any questions about the briefing or if they have encountered unusual circumstances that they would like to discuss.
 - 14) Be sure to thank the officials for helping and let them know what time to be on deck and in position to start the session.
 - 15) In most cases when there are chief judges, the stroke and turn officials will not need radios. Generally, the deck referee(s) and chief judges will get their own radio and headset. The chief judges will also need to give a radio to the administrative referee/official (AO). If there are extra radios, apprentice stroke and turn officials may use one to listen to radio protocol.
 - 16) If there are distance events requiring counters, make sure that you can locate the counters and have them available at the turn end when the event(s) are being contested. Place a counter on each lane just prior to the beginning of the event. In most cases, the starter will be responsible for bringing a bell onto the deck. Double check that there is a bell in the starters’ area. Keep a few distance counting sheets in your swim bag in the event that the starter or referee requests the form. An apprentice starter will generally not have counter sheets.

During the session, the chief judge’s main job is to observe and assist the stroke and turn officials. A chief judge should be vigilant and focused on the activities of the venue at all times. There will be times when a chief judge may need to leave their position or leave the pool deck. When this is necessary, inform the deck referee. Keep your radio on in the event that you are needed back on deck. At all other times, the chief judge’s eyes should be on the deck. The chief judge watches for possible disqualifications, indicated by officials raising a hand over his/her head. It is also recommended that chief judges observe the positioning of the turn officials during the time that they are judging the swimmers in their jurisdiction.

During a prelims-final meet or when there are timed finals events that require the swimmers to complete a “positive check-in,” the swimmer or the coach may approach the chief judge to declare a false start (DFS). If this occurs, let the referee know what event, heat and lane the swimmer is assigned. The swimmer can change their mind and swim the event. After the heat is in the water and the swimmer does not swim the event, the deck referee will call into the AO that there is a DFS, not a no-

show in that particular lane. The chief judge does not need to call in the DFS to the AO by radio. Write and present the DQ slip/DFS to the deck referee after the heat is in the water. The referee only will sign the slip, give it back to the chief judge and the CJ will give the slip to the AO. If a swimmer does not swim in an event that requires a positive check-in, there is a penalty. In most cases, the swimmer is out, is not permitted, to swim their next individual event.

If the chief judge observes an official with a raised hand, this needs to be communicated promptly to the deck referee and done in an expeditious manner. The best way to start this process is to, "Walk and Talk." When the chief judge observes the possible disqualification, they should immediately start walking towards the official while simultaneously saying the following on their radio, "I have a possible disqualification at the turn/start end lanes 1 – 3; stroke lane 1/8." If the official has not lowered his/her hand upon reaching the official, remind them to do so. Ask the official, "What lane?" Circle the number of the lane on your heat sheet and report to the deck referee on your radio a second time, "I have a possible disqualification at the turn end, lane 3." Ask the official for the rule violation and then ask them to describe what they observed (i.e. – "Delay of initiating the turn. After the swimmer turned from their back to their breast, they took a stroke with their right arm, it stopped at their side and the swimmer continued kicking into the wall for approximately three feet before they initiated their turn").

Take notes on your heat sheet in case there is a delay due to the start of the next heat. You may also have additional possible disqualifications in the same heat. When the deck referee is starting the next heat (Blowing the chirps to inform the swimmers to get ready to swim), wait until the heat is in the water and the deck referee has called in any possible no-shows to the AO before getting on your radio to report a possible DQ from the previous heat. Keeping good notes is the best way to manage a busy deck! Use your own form of short hand. After you circle the lane, write on your program what violation was called. For example, use 1HT, R/O (One hand touch, right hand only); Or, DOT, kicks (Delay of turn, independent kicks to make up the distance before initiating the turning motion). You can also keep notes if the swimmer was notified. Use an "N" with a circle around it. If the swimmer was not notified, put a line across the "N."

For some calls like non-simultaneous arms, you will also need to ask the official when the possible disqualification was observed to insure that it was within the official's jurisdiction. If you are clear on the official's call and description, step away from the official and call the deck referee on your radio, "I have a possible disqualification at the turn end, event 45, heat 2, lane 3, for delay of initiating the turn. The official reported

that after the swimmer turned from their back to their breast, they took a stroke with their right arm, it stopped at their side and the swimmer continued kicking into the wall for approximately three feet before they initiated their turn. I recommend the disqualification.”

The referee generally says, “I confirm or I accept the disqualification for delay of initiating the turn, event 45, heat 2, lane 3.” The chief judge will then complete the disqualification slip and present it to the official for their review and printed name. Put your initials to the right side of the official’s printed name. The chief judge at the start end of the pool or possibly an off deck referee will notify the swimmer of the disqualification. After the swimmer has been notified, call into the deck referee, “Swimmer, lane #, has been notified.” The deck referee will say, “Thank you” to acknowledge they heard that the swimmer was notified. When you hear this has been done, check swimmer notified at the bottom of the disqualification slip. Give the completed slip to the presiding referee as soon as possible. At no point should a chief judge or stroke and turn official discuss a DQ with a coach, a timer or a parent. Always refer the coach or other person to the presiding deck referee.

When informing a swimmer of their disqualification, wait until the swimmer is out of the water. Never discuss the DQ with the swimmer when they are still in the water or standing at the edge of the pool next to the blocks. You do not want to block the starter’s view of the swimmers for the next heat. Ask the swimmer to step away from the blocks before talking to them. When notifying the swimmer of their DQ, start the conversation with a positive comment to establish a rapport with the swimmer. Remember, you are not disqualifying the swimmer. The swimmer disqualified them self for a violation of a swimming rule.

In the event that the official was not in a position to properly observe the swimmers in their jurisdiction or the official was not totally sure about the call, remember, any doubt goes to the benefit of the swimmer. Always listen to the complete explanation of the official. Never cut the official off. After discussing the possible disqualification with the official, you can say to the deck referee on the radio, “I have concerns about the call and I do not recommend acceptance for the following reason(s).” You can also request to talk directly to the deck referee, especially if it requires a more lengthy discussion or if you have concerns about an official’s call or description of a call.

If, after mentoring the official on expected deck protocol or you believe the official is making too many calls or seems to be missing many obvious calls, request a conversation with the meet referee. A chief judge does not have the authority to

release an official from the deck. This becomes a wonderful training opportunity to work with the official. If you do not recommend a call, the official deserves an explanation after the session or when the official is on break. Be honest, but be supportive when you discuss the call with the official.

The chief judge assigned to the starter's area, will also need to write a disqualification slip if there is a dual confirmed false start. After the start of a heat, the starter will report a possible false start to the deck referee. If the deck referee confirms the false start, he/she will call on the radio, "I have a dual confirmed false start, event 34, heat 2, lane 3." The chief judge will write the slip, present it first to the starter and then the referee. The referee will give the signed slip back to the chief judge. During this process, it is important to observe the officials in your jurisdiction for any possible swimming violations. After the chief judge notifies the swimmer, check swimmer notified at the bottom of the slip and inform the deck referee, "Swimmer, heat 2, lane 3 notified." Give the slip to the administrative referee/official.

The radio protocol for relay events and processing possible disqualifications can be a real challenge, especially during the short course season. Generally, a chief judge will stand with the side judge during relays. After the fourth swimmer of each team in your respective jurisdiction leaves the blocks, ask the side judge if there are any possible early take-offs. Let the side judge know that they can just tell you, "All clear," if all the exchanges were good. In this case, you do not need to collect the slip or go over to the lane judge because the call must be dual confirmed. If all the exchanges were good, radio the deck referee and say, "Lanes 1-4/5-8 clear." If the side judge gives you a slip with an "X" indicating a possible early take-off, take the relay take-off slip with you and begin walking towards the lane judge while simultaneously saying, "I have a possible early take-off, lane 5, swimmer 3." When you reach the lane judge, ask for their relay take-off slip. If all the exchanges were good, call on your radio, "Lanes 1-4/5-8 clear." If the lane judge has the same early take-off recorded as the side judge, call the deck referee and say, "I have a dual confirmed early take-off, lane 5, swimmer 3; recommend disqualification."

After the deck referee accepts your call, notify one member of the relay team after the heat. It does not need to be the swimmer who left early. If needed, ask the team to wait or ask one of the timers to hold the relay team while you are waiting for confirmation from the deck referee. Write the disqualification slip and have the lane judge as well as the side judge sign the slip. Give both signed relay take-off slips as well as the disqualification slip to the deck referee as soon as possible. Don't forget to tell the deck referee that the team has been notified.

If there is an injured swimmer or if you discover bodily fluids in the pool, on the blocks or on the deck, notify the deck referee immediately. You may also need to assist keeping the area clear or helping to locate a safety marshall or life guard.

After the session, there are a few remaining duties to complete before leaving the venue:

- 1) Collect the heat sheets from the officials. Put the deck referee(s) and starter's heat sheets on the top of the stack, followed by the chief judges and then the stroke and turn officials. If there is a timeline posted near the starting area, the last referee will record the finish time and sign at the bottom. Put the timeline on the top of the stack of heat sheets. Give the heat sheets to the AOs.
- 2) Collect the radios and headsets and put them back into the chargers for the next session. Be sure to retrieve the radio from the AO.
- 3) Gather the lap counters, if distance events were swum, and put them back where they were initially stored. Check to see that the bell was returned to the office.
- 4) And finally, and most importantly, thank all the officials for helping at session.

Reflect on your job as a chief judge. If you were not sure about a particular call or procedure, ask the deck or meet referee or an experienced official for advice. Remember, you are still learning and some day you may aspire to become a deck referee.