



Referee Clinic

April 2024

One Certification: Referee

Two Roles:

Deck Referee

Meet Referee

Deck Referee

Managing the Competition in This Pool

- The Team
- The Procedures
- Handling Disqualifications
- Accommodations
- Working With Coaches
- Swim-offs
- The Rules

Deck Referee: The Team

The Deck Referee is responsible for a fair environment in which the swimmers will be competing. To accomplish that, the deck is staffed with a number of people with different jobs. The Deck Referee must be a facilitator in helping that staff get their jobs done correctly and at the same time allow them the freedom to do those jobs. While the Deck Referee needs to know all the jobs of the others on deck, it is not his or her job to do them all. He or she will have enough to do.

Deck Referee: The Team

- Stroke & Turn Judges
 - They are your staff, the people who are working the line
- Chief Judges
 - The managers - they are your eyes, your ears - your communications link to the deck
- Starters
 - Key individual for a smooth flowing session
 - A second set of eyes and ears to help “watch your back”

Deck Referee: The Team

- Announcer
 - Valuable resource for facilitating communications with coaches and swimmers (e.g. swim-offs)
 - Need to work closely with for finals procedures
 - Don't make the mistake of assuming they know less than you
- Meet Referee
 - CEO
 - Establishes guidelines regarding protocols/procedures for a given meet that the deck referees, starters and judges need to follow
 - The next level to which coaches can go on an issue

Deck Referee: Procedures

The pool is yours while you are the deck referee

- Coordinate with the Meet Referee and other Deck Referees
 - How are heats to be run – clear pool, fly-overs, chase starts
 - Standard whistle protocols
 - Manage starting area
 - Any precedents that may have been set in prior sessions
 - Any unusual venue characteristics that need to be managed
 - What are the scratch procedures for the meet?
 - What are the procedures for “no-shows” and declared false starts?
 - What are the procedures for a DQ?
 - Who is writing the slip?
 - Who informs the swimmer/coach?
 - Radio Protocols
 - Make sure you and the chief judges are on the same page when it comes to how calls are to be made

Deck Referee: Procedures

- Work closely with the starter - be sure that each of you knows what the other is expecting
 - Relative positions on the deck
 - Who approaches who for a false start?
 - Timing of when the short and long whistles are sounded
 - Keeping order of finish
 - Checking the next heat to see if there are any open lanes/missing swimmers
 - Any accommodations for swimmers with a disability
 - Watching for issues/situations that could cause a problem
 - Keep them informed...remember, they don't have a radio
- Allow the starter to pick his or her best spot and then position yourself appropriately
 - Can see all lanes clearly
 - Does not block the starter's field of vision
 - Allows the starter to see you out of his or her peripheral vision

Deck Referee: Procedures

The Start

- Whistles

- Follow guidance from the Meet Referee on heat pacing (when to start your whistles).
- Blow series of short whistles to advise next heat that their heat is coming up shortly
- Blow long whistle to ask the swimmers to step on the block or step in the water. Never blow your long whistles until the prior heat touches the wall (to avoid any safety issues).
- For backstroke blow second long whistle to call swimmers to the end of the pool – it is recommended that this whistle be blown as soon as all swimmers are in the water and all their heads have come up above the water. *Don't wait for them all to be "ready on the wall"...that's the starter's job.*
- If you need to "pick up the pace", don't rush your whistles or your Starter, just start your short whistles sooner next time.

Deck Referee: Procedures

The Start

- Allow the starter to pick his or her best spot and then position yourself appropriately
 - Can see all lanes clearly
 - Does not block the starter's field of vision
 - Allows the starter to see you out of his or her peripheral vision
- Whistles
 - Follow guidance from the Meet Referee on heat pacing (when to start your whistles).
 - Blow series of short whistles to advise next heat that their heat is coming up shortly. Make them distinct, so they don't run together into one long whistle.
 - Blow long whistle to ask the swimmers to step on the block or step in the water. Never blow your long whistles until the prior heat touches the wall (to avoid any safety issues).
 - For backstroke blow second long whistle to call swimmers to the end of the pool – it is recommended that this whistle be blown as soon as all swimmers are in the water and all their heads have come up above the water. *Don't wait for them all to be "ready on the wall"...that's the starter's job.*

Deck Referee: Procedures

The Start (continued)

- Extending the Arm
 - Extending the arm turns the heat over to the starter
 - Be prompt in turning the heat over to the starter
 - We don't want to wait until the swimmers are ready to start to turn it over to the starter – the swimmers will have to wait too long
 - When all swimmers are on the blocks (or at the pool edge) and have settled down
 - When backstrokers are at the wall and have placed their feet
- Other considerations
 - If there are issues behind the blocks - you may delay extending your arm in case a swimmer is trying to get to the block – scan the field for similar issues
 - If you need to take back control of the heat, lower your arm but also give a verbal indication to the starter to hold up the starter process

Deck Referee: Procedures

The Start (continued)

- No Shows
 - Preliminaries – might be announced over the radio, depends on the meet
 - Finals – might be announced, alternates might be sought...depends on the meet
 - Note all NS and DFS on your heat sheet. You'll need to keep a running tally to close-out with Admin at the end of the event.
- Alternates
 - Know which heats are eligible for placing alternates
 - Alternates should present and ready to swim to be considered, not getting dressed or across the pool when called
 - Suggest that swimmers be stepped back down to place an alternate (and then long-whistled back up)

Deck Referee: Procedures

During the race

- At the beginning of *each* heat, review “the circle”:
 1. Watch the athletes’ heads come up, and confirm any empty lanes
 2. Check the clock to be sure it’s running, and the names on the scoreboard
 3. Look back at the starting blocks to confirm swimmers are left behind or any other issues
 4. Look at down your heat sheet and confirm...
 - Any empty lanes (NS/DFS) from #1
 - The heat you’re on matches the scoreboard from #2
 - ...and mark off the current heat and note any False Starts (more on that later)
 - ...and make any necessary radio calls to Admin
 5. Promptly return your attention to the pool

Deck Referee: Procedures

During the race

- Primary focus is on the race – the chief judges are watching the officials
- Don't "hang out" with the starter
- By observing the race, you might see the infraction as well as the judge
- Keep the Admin team informed of DQ's, no show's, lane/heat changes, etc.
- Remember, its your pool...if something doesn't look right (lane line too loose, official out of position, crowded behind the blocks), work with your team to get it fixed

Deck Referee: Procedures

- Be prepared to multi-task to keep the meet moving
- Avoid distractions if possible – when they happen, keep them short or delay them until after the race
- You have a good team of judges on deck – let them do their job, don't try to do it for them
- Keep track of your heat intervals and overall timeline – the swimmers set their preparation based on that timeline, and a smooth consistent “flow” results in better competition
- Avoid any unnecessary delays. Ask for help, or a step-in referee if needed

Deck Referee: Handling Disqualifications

False Starts

- After watching the swimmers surface (and completing your “circle”), discretely note the lane number(s) in writing on your heat sheet of those you saw false start...even if it was “obvious to everyone”
- The Starter should approach the referee if he or she saw movement and the lane number(s) should be indicated in writing.
- Confirm with the Starter is by comparing the lane number(s) written on each other’s heat sheets. If you get match for any lane, a false start is confirmed.
- Announce the false start over the radio (identify heat and lane number). The Starter or start-end CJ should fill out the DQ slip.

Deck Referee: Handling Disqualifications

A Call from a Stroke and Turn Judge

- The three questions
 - What was the judge's position/jurisdiction?
 - What did he or she see?
 - What rule was broken?
- If CJ's are present, follow the Meet Referee's guidance on how much vetting the Deck Referee should do...but don't accept a call you don't understand or aren't comfortable with
- It's not usually necessary to go into extended "quizzing" of the judges, but try to get enough understanding of what happened that you could respond to question from a coach
- If extended discussion is warranted, do it face-to-face, not over the radio

Deck Referee: Handling Disqualifications

Recording the information

- When the initial call comes in, make notes of it on your heat sheet, including whether you accepted it or not. Develop a shorthand that you AND SOMEONE ELSE can read/understand.
- If you accept a call, repeat the FULL call back to the CJ or judge including event, heat, lane and infraction
- Before you sign the DQ slip, confirm what was written matches your notes
- Reject incorrect slips – have them corrected or rewritten
- Confirm that athletes or coaches get notified

- Keep running track of DQs per event (and no-shows and DFS) so you can close-out with Admin after the last heat

Deck Referee: Handling Disqualifications

- Relays

- Make sure that your judges know how to complete the relay take-off ballots
- Follow guidance from the Meet Referee on radio protocol for relays and whether relay takeoff pads will be used.
- Early takeoff call should be accepted or rejected like any other call.
- When you sign the DQ slip, confirm that the supporting takeoff ballots are attached

Deck Referee: Handling Disqualifications

- Referee making a call alone
 - Rule 102.13.2 - “The Referee has the authority to disqualify a swimmer for any violation of the rules that the Referee personally observes . . .”
 - Even though you CAN make calls, generally don’t...
 - Let your judges do their jobs
 - It’s hard for you to see the whole pool
 - It’s unlikely you are watching all of every heat
- If your judges are missing calls, provide them with mentoring (personally or ask your CJs)
- If the call is an obvious “venue call” (everyone can see it), and none of the judges are taking action, then you can make the call yourself.
 - This should be rare occurrence

Deck Referee: Accommodations

- USA Swimming Rule Article 105 governs officiating swimmers with disabilities
 - The swimmer or coach is responsible for notifying the referee, prior to competition, of any requested accommodation or modification
 - The Referee can (and should) provide Accommodations, which are considerations to allow access (more time, space or assistance)
 - Lane assignment
 - Personal assistant to get on blocks
 - Additional time to enter/exit
 - Etc.
 - The referee can (and should, within the rules) provide Modifications, which are exceptions to the technical rules
 - Strobe
 - Alternate judging for missing or unusable body parts
 - Etc.
 - Article 105 discusses several disabilities and related accommodations and modifications
 - Blind or vision loss
 - Deaf or hearing loss
 - Cognitive impairment
 - Other physical disabilities

Deck Referee: Swim-Offs

- Remember the goal: Determine which swimmer(s) should qualify for what place in the finals or as alternates
- Follow guidance from the Meet Referee for which ties should be resolved. The “consequential ones” only (8th, 16th, etc.) or the “also consequential if we get one medical scratch (8th, 9th, 16th, 17th, etc.)?”
- Get the coaches together to identify the best time to hold the swim-off as provided by the rules (any time, but not more than 45 minutes after the last heat of any event in which one of the swimmers is competing that session)
- Swim-offs can be resolved by means other than re-swimming the exact event (with concurrence by all involved). Could be a coin flip, a shorter distance swim or even a different event swum.

Deck Referee: Working with Coaches

- Coaches are not the enemy – they are looking out for the best interests of their swimmers
- Coaches are smart when it comes to their swimmers and swimming – take advantage of that – they can help solve problems or resolve issues
- Keep the communication lines open
- We are here to support the efforts of the swimmers to excel in a fair and impartial environment

- If you see coaches you don't know, introduce yourself!

Deck Referee: Working with Coaches

- If a coach comes to you with an issue, listen – don't try to provide an answer prematurely – *even if you think you already know the answer*
- Be calm – do not become defensive
- Understand what the issue is about and then investigate
- Use your team - ask for advice from other officials or even other coaches as needed
- Make your decision based on the best information you can get
- Be firm but fair
- If the coach is not happy, he or she can speak with the Meet Referee

Deck Referee: The Rules

- Prepare for the meet
 - Read the rule book regularly so that you can keep those aspects of the rules that don't come up very often fresh in your mind. You may not know every detail, but you will know if there is a rule that applies to any situation that arises and you will know where to find it
 - Read the meet announcement to understand the procedures being used for this meet
 - Know which events are yours and be ready to do your job prior to the start of the event
 - If there is more than one deck referee, if you are "off", be nearby in case the "on" deck referee needs assistance with a protest or other situation

Deck Referee: Additional Resources

Your Whistle

You can use ANY whistle you are comfortable with and that people can hear....don't let anyone tell you any different....just be considerate of everyone's ears. For recommendations...

Almost everyone thinks that a whistle with a 'pea' inside is a better choice. The Fox40 style whistles with no 'pea' are harder to make distinctive short and long whistles with, and make you sound like a lifeguard, and are often uncomfortably ear-piercing.

For whistle brand, the Acme whistles are generally highly regarded.

For officiating, the Acme Thunderer whistles are very common.

The Acme Thunderer 60.5 is small and super easy to blow, but it is VERY LOUD and pretty shrill. (This one hurts some people's ears.)

The Acme Thunderer 59.5 is medium size, a little harder to blow, not quite as loud, and has more pleasing note. (This is a favorite.)

The Acme Thunderer 58.5 and 58 sound pretty cool (nice low note), but are getting pretty big around your neck, and can be a little 'tiring' to blow after a few hours on deck.

If you get a metal whistle like the ones above, it's usually more comfortable if you get a rubber whistle tip, like this.

Mostly, any tip will fit any whistle, because it's rubber and stretches...plus, they're cheap.

You can also buy one of the Acme plastic whistles (e.g. Thunderer 560). They work/sound just fine, and you won't need the rubber tip...they just don't look as 'fancy'.

Just about all of that is available on Amazon. Some is available at sporting goods or discount stores.

Deck Referee: Additional Resources

- The “Professional” Deck Referee
- Situations & Resolutions

Meet Referee

Managing the Competition for the Whole Meet

- The Team
- Before the Meet
- At the Meet
- After the Meet
- The Calendar

Meet Referee: The Team

The Meet Referee is part of the “meet management” partnership sharing responsibility for the whole meet with the Meet Director/Host.

The Meet Referee is focused on the rules, staffing of officials, and the actual conduct of the competition (102.11).

The Meet Director is responsible for planning, sanctioning, facilities, equipment, entries, hospitality, communication, and personnel other than officials (102.9).

Once the meet begins, the Meet Referee has full authority over the conduct of the meet, but the Meet Director typically still represents the interests of the host, the event, and the facility.

Both should always be working as a team.

Meet Referee: The Team

The Meet Referee works closely with other key players through both cooperation and delegation:

- Administrative Official/Referee
- Deck Officials
- Evaluator
- Coaches
- Meet Jury
- Announcer

Build rapport with the team, and work with everyone to clarify roles and responsibilities.

Keep your Admin 'in the loop' on all meet planning, any pre-meet instruction to officials, and communication with coaches. Your Admin will provide valuable input and support and is often a logical choice to delegate Meet Referee tasks to if you are juggling multiple issues.

Meet Referee: Before the Meet

Support the Meet Director in securing the sanction

- Review the Meet Information
 - Check for any obvious errors
 - Confirm your understanding of any competition specific timelines or policies (check-in, cut times, scratch rules, event limits)
 - Suggest any missing 'flexibility clauses' to allow discretion for combining events/heats, running time trials, using extra lanes, adding breaks
 - Check the 'Officials' section for your expected language on briefing times, contact info and attire
- Be prepared to help recruit the other officials for the sanction
 - The Admin (confirm compatibility with meet director/host/staff)
 - Two other deck officials: at least one must be certified as a Starter, but best practice is to use the sanction to get early confirmation of a couple key DR/SR positions.

Meet Referee: Before the Meet

Recruit and Inform Officials

- Recruiting communication varies by meet, but generally
 - Send out a “Call for Officials.” Include any officials in the area who may be interested.
 - If necessary, send out a “Second Call for Officials.” This one can be targeted at teams you know are entered.
 - If you didn’t provide complete info in your “Calls”, be sure to provide complete info to those who volunteered at least a couple days before the meet:
 - Specific times/locations for briefings
 - Rough timelines for sessions
 - Attire
 - Parking
 - Your contact info for late or no-show
- Develop a system for organizing your roster. It could be 4 people, or 50...

Meet Referee: Before the Meet

Be Informed

Know the rules.

Know the meet information.

Be in-sync with the Meet Director and Admin on how common protocols and situations will be handled (scratches, work-ins, no-shows, fines, deck access, weather, first aid, etc.).

Review the information that gets posted (timelines, psych sheets, heat sheets, warm-up guidelines, coaches' packets, etc.).

Meet Referee: At the Meet

Pre-Session Briefings

Tailor them to meet. For a simple closed meet where everyone knows the drill, 5 minutes might be too long. For a big event, you may have a lot of material to cover. Topics may include...

- Thank you!
- Introductions (the Admin? Trainees?)
- Safe sport reminders
- Logistics like parking, bathrooms, clerk location, pool names, specific event notes for certain distance or genders, switching ends for 50s, etc.
- Protocol choices: CJ roles, radio expectations, stand/sit, relief/breaks, handling no-shows or DFS
- Protocol reminders: step up, raise your hand, breaks off deck
- Jurisdiction
- Deck Ref instructions: flyover/chase, work-in?, closeout
- Assignments including relief/breaks, key rotation points, expectations for trainee participation (watch vs. help vs. take the lead)
- Closing reminders: Timer briefing assignments, “be on deck by...”

Meet Referee: At the Meet

Pre-Session Briefings

Time permitting, also a good time for...

- LSC/USA news

- Words from an 'honored guest'

- Reminder of upcoming meets

- Reminder of any new rule changes

Avoid lengthy discussion of any particular rule to avoid creating a "Call of the Day" on deck. Take those talks offline.

Meet Referee: At the Meet

Assignments

For longer sessions, look for ways to give deck officials some 'change of scenery'.

- Assigned relief – best practice at championship meets
- Rotating positions...but don't overdo it. Suggest only one or two changes of position for stroke/turn per session, and ideally during a lull, like a relay break or a freestyle event.

Look to assign extra staff where your pressure points are.

- Assigned OOF during 50s
- Extra CJ help during high workload events

Avoid always assigning your most experienced officials to the same senior roles. Give them the opportunity to mentor new officials at a variety of positions.

**Assignments and briefings are often conflicting duties that are happening at the same time. Don't hesitate to delegate assignments to another trusted official.

Meet Referee: At the Meet

Assignments - Trainees

Try to accommodate training requests where possible, as long as you aren't jeopardizing the smooth operation of the meet.

Give Stroke & Turn trainees options for different mentors and positions.

If you are worried about an inexperienced official at an assigned position, consider...

- Pairing the 'rookie' with a 'pro'
- Keeping the assignment relatively short (just an event or two)
- Easing them in...CJ rotates to DR, or OOF rotates to Starter

Make sure the trainees get feedback and get an opportunity to ask questions from the people they work with or from you. Be realistic about feedback. If trainees aren't ready to advance, let them know what areas to work on in the future.

Meet Referee: At the Meet

Coaches Meeting

Tailor this to the meet. There may be nothing to say, especially at a closed meet. If so, skip the meeting.

If there is a meeting, coordinate a convenient time with the Meet Director, if a time isn't already published.

Possible topics:

- Scratch/check-in/no-show policy reminders
- Events with unusual order/seeding/location (e.g. “the boys 500 will be in the diving well”)
- Missed event expectations, particularly if there are no work-ins
- Any athletes requesting accommodations for disabilities ?

If you have information for the coaches, be concise. They will be understandably eager to get back to their teams.

Meet Referee: At the Meet

Meet Management

The Meet Referee is responsible for overseeing the competition (102.11).

At a small meet, the Meet Referee may not be much more than the Deck Referee whose name is on the sanction.

At a larger meet, delegate the officiating (Deck Ref, Starter, Judges) to your team of officials to free yourself up to work issues that arise with athletes, coaches, parents, facilities, safety, weather, etc.

If the workload on deck or in Admin warrants direct help from the Meet Referee, look for options to support the Admins, Deck Referees or CJs assigned...rather than assuming the Deck Referee position directly. That allows you to more easily transition out of 'helping' if an issue that requires the Meet Referee's attention arises.

Meet Referee: At the Meet

Disqualifications

Unless you're also the Deck Referee, your team will handle the DQs.

If you see/hear a call doesn't make sense or might be likely to get attention (unusual call, call during a competitive finals event), you can be proactive about getting a summary from your Deck Referee, but only intervene when asked or when necessary to assure fair competition or smooth operations.

Let the Judges and Deck Referees do their jobs, and don't overturn a call without justification. Be mindful of precedents you set.

Meet Referee: At the Meet

Take an Interest

Take time during the meet to check in with not only the deck officials and Admin, but also the Meet Director and the Coaches on deck. Communicate regularly and sincerely.

- You may learn of something that needs attention
- You will build rapport that may come in handy when issues arise later
- Never treat staff, coaches, parents, etc. like the enemy. More often than not, those people will be the solution to your problem.

Meet Referee: At the Meet

When Issues Arise

Be Consistent – across officials, across teams, across athletes, across sessions

Be Fair and Give Benefit of Doubt to the Swimmer – look for opportunities within the rules to allow the athletes to compete

Be Thoughtful – Don't jump to answer when problems arise. LISTEN to those raising the issue. Take the time to talk with your team. Respond after you've considered the options.

Be Professional – Stay calm. Stay approachable. Don't escalate an already emotional situation. If a conversation gets 'heated', take it off deck if possible.

Meet Referee: After the Meet

End of Competition

- Thank your staff.
- Save any documentation you need: rosters, assignments, timelines.
- Offer any relevant documentation of the competition you have to the Meet Director.
- Confirm that the job is done with Admin and Meet Director, and offer any help you can with 'closing up shop'.
- Be open to feedback for next time.

Meet Referee: After the Meet

Meet Referee Documentation

- Add all officials' sessions in OTS
 - For a large meet, this can be delegated with OTS Admin feature
- Send a thank you message to the officials
- Send the required report to STX (Officials Chair, SWIMS User...and best practice to copy the Admin and Meet Director)

Meet Referee: The Calendar

...depends on the meet. A typical age group meet might look like...

Before the meet

- Meet Info, Sanction: 3 weeks to 3 months before
- Call for Officials: 1-2 weeks before
- Info to Officials: 2-5 days before

The Meet!

After the meet

- OTS, Thank You Email, and Meet Ref Report: 1-2 days after

Next Steps

- Take and pass the online Referee test (if you haven't already).
- Work *at least* 4 sessions of on-deck training as a Referee.
- Secure 2 passing evaluations from qualified Certifiers.
- Notify the [Officials Chair](#) when complete.

If you want to serve as Meet Referee, we recommend serving as an “Assistant Meet Referee” with an experienced Referee...so you can practice that role a couple times before taking on the larger responsibility.