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USA Swimming Officials Newsletter

April 2017

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You're Being Watched

By Jack Neill

A new season means lots of new officials on deck and lots of opportunities for veteran officials to serve as mentors. Mentoring plays a significant role in the training of new officials, helping the trainee attain the skills and confidence needed to become an effective deck official.

Many LSCs assign mentors to apprentice officials as part of a formal training program. But all experienced officials are de facto mentors—newer officials watch us to see how we act, what we say, what we do, how we handle various situations, and then base their actions and words on what they've observed. While we aim to be unobtrusive to swimmers, coaches, and spectators, we are all constantly being studied by our apprentice officials.

The dictionary defines a mentor as “a trusted counselor or guide” and “a wise, loyal advisor or coach.” The original Mentor was a character in Homer's epic poem The Odyssey. When Odysseus went off to fight the Trojan Wars, he entrusted his son, Telemachus, into Mentor's care. Mentor was a tutor, guide, and protector to the boy for many years, teaching by words as well as by actions. We take our lead from this character.

The goal is to educate by example. Conversations can be motivating, but teaching by example has impact. It's one thing to tell a trainee to “observe but do not scrutinize,” but it's much more powerful to demonstrate this on a consistent basis. As John Wooden once said, “Being a role model is the most powerful form of educating.”

Model respect. Don't criticize swimmers, coaches, or other officials. Respect and support decisions made by the referee. It's vitally important for apprentice officials to see and hear us interacting appropriately with swimmers and coaches. This is particularly true when delivering bad news; if we consistently approach these occasions respectfully, professionally, and with empathy, our new officials will likely do the same when placed in a similar situation. While these incidents can become stressful, it's critical that apprentice officials see us handle the stress in a positive manner.

Think out loud. Give the apprentice some insight into your thought process and how you arrive at your decisions. Make it a conversation, not a lecture. Don't focus solely on performance or behaviors that need to improve; let your apprentice know when he/she is doing something well. And when you have suggestions for improvement, use language that supports without criticism.

Model a professional look. The new officials have all heard that they need to be neat in attire, and attentive and focused in deportment. But this needs to be reinforced by seeing every deck official demonstrating these behaviors consistently.

At this time of the year all of us are mentors, regardless of whether the LSC has a formal mentoring program or not. As a mentor, your actions are being appraised, so you must set the bar for yourself just as high, or higher, than you'd expect from your new officials.

The less-experienced officials on deck are watching you, looking for a role model. Be their mentor.

The Backstroke Start

By Jay Thomas, Chairman – Rules and Regulations Committee

NOTE: ***Bold and italicized text*** represent exact wording from the USA Swimming rules.

Occasionally questions regarding the backstroke start are raised and this article will attempt to provide some clarity regarding the governing rules.

For backstroke starts, Rules 101.1.2 A-C apply. This rule describes the start sequence to the point the Starter gives the Take Your Mark command. In rule 101.1.2C, there is some language that specifically addresses the forward start. For the backstroke start specific requirements, reference rule 101.4.1- Backstroke.

This rule requires that ***the swimmers shall line up in the water facing the starting end, with both hands placed on the gutter or on the starting grips***. This section of the rule specifies that both of the swimmer's hands be in contact with the gutter or both hands on the starting grips. Having one hand on the gutter and one hand on the starting grips would be an illegal starting position which should be corrected prior to the start.

Occasionally it is suggested that the starting grips should be wherever the swimmer chooses to grip. This is incorrect. Rule 103 governs our Facility Standards. Rule 103.14.4 defines the specifications for Backstroke Starting Grips. These grips are the only grips that may be used for backstroke starts. Some blocks are equipped with starting grips mounted to the block tops. Those grips are for forward starts. Swimmers attempting to use those starting grips would be in an illegal backstroke starting position which should be corrected prior to the start.

Rule 101.4 states that ***standing in or on the gutter, placing the toes above the lip of the gutter, or bending the toes over the lip of the gutter, before or after the start, is prohibited***. Swimmers

who are not compliant with these requirements should be corrected prior to the start. Swimmers with a legal foot placement prior to the start signal who move to an illegal starting position after the start should be disqualified. This violation is normally observed by the turn judge.

Some facilities may be equipped with backstroke starting ledges. Rule 103.15 defines the specifications for the ledge and how it may be used. The rules permit the ledge to be adjustable within a range of 4cm above or below the water's surface. Obviously, pools with gutter mounted touch pads will not be able to have the ledge set at a level above the top of the gutter. Rule 101.4.1 requires ***the toes of both feet to be in contact with the end wall or faceplate of the touchpad.*** To clarify that requirement – at least one toe of each foot must be in contact with the end wall or faceplate of the touchpad. See the USA Swimming Officiating Video Series – Backstroke – at 00:35 – 00:45 seconds – for two examples of legal foot placement. Illegal foot placement should be corrected prior to the start.

Finally, rule 101.1E states that ***A swimmer shall not be disqualified for an illegal starting position at the start if the race is permitted to proceed. Enforcement of the correct starting position is the responsibility of the Starter.*** Legal foot position in a backstroke start can be difficult to see for all lanes. The judges assigned to observe the start MAY be assigned duties to signal to the Starter and Referee when an illegal starting position is observed prior to the start. The rule requires that, even if the judge was signaling to the Referee prior to the start that an illegal starting position has been observed, if the race is permitted to proceed, no disqualification may be made.

Do you have a question you would like to see clarified in this column? Send your suggestions to your LSC Official's Chair who will forward them to our Committee for clarification.

Maxwell Award Winner: Lisa Jackson

Each LSC or other governing body can submit a candidate that is deserving of recognition and the winning official is selected by a sub-committee of the National Officials Committee to be recognized in Swimming World magazine every two months. April's recognition goes to Lisa Jackson with North Carolina Swimming.

Lisa is a single mother of three kids, all swimmers. While many parents can't seem to find the time to attend a swim meet, Lisa typically works all session of a meet and manages to provide a dish for hospitality.

Lisa has mentored many of the stroke and turns, starters and referees in her area. While all three have graduated high school (2 went on to swim in college), Lisa continues to support the swimming community helping out when needed.



Congrats Lisa!

