

## **In Officiating “Practice makes perfect”**

Through the encouragement of your club director of officials and the support of other parents who have persuaded you to take an officials’ clinic, you now find yourself, sometimes with a little trepidation, ready to try your hand as a deck official. After pondering the shift opportunities at the next meet, you place your name down for a “nice safe” stroke and await your first opportunity to join others on the deck.

This or some similar scenario typifies the initial experience of every parent who has worked the deck at a BCSSA meet. It is from this point that some of you decide to continue your training through further clinics and ponder a future with more senior responsibilities such as starter or referee.

With these “senior” positions possess a certain prestige because of the authority and responsibility associated with them, we would like to extol the virtue of striving to become a more competent stroke and turn official first. I believe the success of a meet in terms of officiating depends not only on the knowledge, but also on the accumulated experience of all deck officials as stroke and turn officials, and this includes the starter and referee.

The stroke and turn official is the sole person responsible for deciding initially, on the legality of various aspects of a stroke. To become effective, a stroke and turn official must become completely familiar with all the rules regarding each stroke and keep abreast of various interpretations and changes that occur with time. However, this “theory” must then be put into practice, and only through repeated exposure to “the real thing” can an official obtain a true understanding of the intent of a rule and be able to apply it consistently and properly.

An effective official is one who is seen to exercise sound judgement. Being “seen” is an important aspect in the development of a skilled official, and this too, comes by continuously participating over a number of seasons. Confidence and trust are the rewards that are gained by such an official, not only from other officials, but from coaches and parents as well.

An effective official is one whose knowledge of the rules judiciously applied coupled with experience provides the confidence to write an accurate explanation of each disqualification. Such an official understands that the “wordings sheet” that is provided to assist in writing disqualifications may not accurately reflect an observed infraction. However, the official is prepared to take the time to ensure that the description provided is unambiguous and complete.

An effective official recognizes that while stroke and turn can be a stepping stone to becoming a referee or starter, it is also a skill to be mastered and that it is important to take the time and gain the experience necessary to perform the role successfully.

Finally, it is vital that our referees and starters are also effective stroke and turn officials, as they will be called upon to serve in that role or to adjudicate questions of interpretation. Acceptance of their decisions will be facilitated by confidence of the aquatic community in their skills and knowledge about the very strokes in question.

**Tony Dixon**

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