

COACHES AND OFFICIALS ARE A TEAM

When parents volunteer as officials at meets, they are often unaware of the collaborative relationship that can, and I believe should always exist between officials and coaches. Ideally, these two groups have the same goal – the development of the skills of the athletes. Officials are involved with the swimmers only during competition while coaches are engaged in all aspects of the athlete's performance. Nevertheless, particularly in a developmental organization such as the BCSSA, the official's role as an assessor of performance provides the coach with feedback that affects his or her athlete's future training.

Unfortunately, officials often perceive their relationship with coaches as adversarial and there are a number of reasons for this. Particularly as new officials, our inexperience makes us more sensitive to criticism. As new officials we are anxious not to make mistakes and are often overzealous in our efforts to avoid doing so. This often leads to officials who are branded as either "unobservant" or "too anxious to disqualify".

Some officials may believe that it is appropriate for the official-coach relationship to be adversarial. This is true of most sports where the rules dictate that coaches cannot challenge the decisions of officials, and when they do so, it is often confrontational and punitive action may follow. However, swimming is unusual in that a process exists for coaches to question the decisions of any official. Furthermore, coaches should be encouraged to exercise their right to use the process when they have a genuine belief that an error has occurred.

This process is well-defined, yet surprisingly few people, including officials other than referees, are familiar with the steps:

1. The coach makes a verbal appeal of a disqualification to the session referee within 30 minutes of the notification of disqualification.
2. The session referee reviews the circumstances, renders a decision, and advises the coach.
3. The coach may then submit a written appeal of the disqualification within 30 minutes of being advised by the session referee.
4. The session referee submits the written appeal to the meet manager.
5. The meet manager convenes a jury of experienced officials (an odd number) who were not working the deck at the time of the disqualification.
6. The jury reviews the circumstances, calls witnesses, and a decision is made by voting. The chair (usually the meet manager) does not have a vote.
7. The chair conveys the decision to the coach.

When training officials however, this process is examined in detail only during the referees' clinics. This is because it is the referee who is initially responsible for addressing any appeals that coaches may submit. However, I believe that the steps should be familiar to everyone involved in the meet, be it swimmers, coaches, deck officials, or parents.

Parents who have officiated in other sports may find it difficult to have their authority challenged. Officials occasionally have approached me following appeals of their disqualifications, concerned about such challenges. Particularly if their decisions are overturned, some officials feel this reflects poorly on their abilities. Officials with such concerns need to be assured that an appeal, like the original disqualification, is part of a well-defined process. As part of their job, coaches should be prepared to appeal decisions,

and that appeals should not be construed as a commentary on the qualifications of the official.

Coaches too can play a role in encouraging a constructive positive relationship with officials. A knowledge of both the rules and an understanding of the process will help coaches avoid making inappropriate appeals or overlook options that are available to them when acting as their swimmer's advocate. Some Regions now conduct clinics with the coaches and some of the senior and master officials in their region. Usually held at the beginning of the season, these sessions provide an opportunity for coaches to question the officials about procedures and for officials to explain their role to coaches. It is thus an opportunity for officials and coaches to establish a joint working relationship as a team with a common goal: the success of their swimmers.

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