General Principles of Officiating

Module 3

People Management

NOTES

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Introduction

Technical Officials play an important role in all sports. Without officials giving up their time most sporting competitions would not go ahead.

Officiating can be a challenge at times but if performed in a positive manner it is an interesting, varied and rewarding activity. Officials need to ensure that their approach towards officiating is in line with the aims of the competition and be aware that their approach can influence the participants' experience and enjoyment of competitive swimming.

Good people management skills, how you relate to and manage swimmers, coaches and fellow officials prior to, during and following competition, are essential for all Technical Officials.

The three main people management skills for a swimming Technical Official are;
- Communication
- Managing conflict
- Working with other officials

Communication Skills

Communication skills are essential in any area of human interaction, on whatever level. Communication is the one activity all people share.

Good, effective communication is an important part of officiating and includes the following methods:
- Voice
  - Introductions to swimmers and coaches before the meet.
  - Briefing Technical Officials before and after the meet.
  - Conveying instructions to competitors throughout the meet.
  - Explaining rule infractions to participants during the meet.
- Whistle
  - Conveying instructions to competitors for each heat.
- Indications / Signals
  - Use of starting signal to start each heat.
  - Event Referee handing control to the Starter by signalling with an outstretched arm.
  - Inspectors of Turns operating the Lap Counters in distance events.
  - Technical Officials using arm signals to officials at the other end of the pool.
- Body Language
- Written
  - Drawing up officials rosters.
  - Completing infraction reports.
  - Completing incident reports.
  - Responding to a protest that has been lodged.

- Submitting meet reports.

Whether the communication is oral, visual or written it provides messages, instructions, information and feedback to a variety of people.
The ability to listen effectively is the single most important factor in becoming a good communicator. When a Technical Official listens effectively they can respond appropriately. Listening is the ability to receive, interpret and respond to both verbal and non-verbal messages in ways that are appropriate for the purpose.

Communication is a two-way interaction that involves sending and receiving messages and signals. Good communicators learn to receive and interpret signals so they can be proactive rather than reactive when they respond. Therefore feedback can only be beneficial if there is an opportunity to learn and improve a situation, so never put someone down to show your own superiority.

When providing feedback:
- Describe the behaviour that is relevant to the performance, without adding a value judgement.
- Be specific to ensure that the other person understands what you're talking about.
- Consider the needs of both you and the person to whom you are giving the feedback to. Make sure that the feedback also addresses the needs of the other person.
- Involve the other person as you give feedback, ask for their input; don't just impose your view.

The key to effective communication is adjusting what we say and how we say it to fit other peoples' communication patterns. ***Communicate with people the way they prefer, not the way you prefer.***

Swimmers and coaches want officials that communicate confidently and decisively.

Managing Conflict

Technical Officials are occasionally called upon to manage conflict and attempt to resolve a situation. Dealing with conflict is hard for any Technical Official but good officiating relies on conflict being handled professionally and positively.

Conflict is likely to arise in a number of situations which include:
- Disagreement from a swimmer over an infraction.
- Perceived bias shown by a Technical Official in the eyes of a swimmer / coach.
- Frustration shown by swimmers as a result of their level of performance.
- Misunderstanding of instructions or rulings from a Technical Official.

Preventing Conflict - There are occasions when conflict in the sporting environment is inevitable but Technical Officials should endeavour to minimise the chances. Prevention is better than the cure.
- Make swimmers aware of your presence by reacting immediately (when appropriate).
- Be definite and firm with decisions and communication.

- Look sharp and act sharp – you need to indicate confidence in managing the situation.
- Don't take criticisms personally – swimmers and coaches are seeing the event from a different perspective to the officials.
- Keep calm and speak clearly and firmly.

Resolving Conflict – On those occasions when a situation of conflict has arisen and you are attempting to resolve it:
- Be professional – listen attentively, speak clearly and stay composed. Avoid argument or debate.
- Remain calm and don't overreact. Stay relaxed and adopt low key body language. Use objective, neutral language.
- Address the problem and not the emotions; try to put aside the emotions of all parties. By dealing with the facts, you as the Technical Official are more likely to be seen as making a fair and appropriate decision.
- Focus on the person. Acknowledge a swimmer with eye contact and use their name if possible. Listen to what they have to say and don't just dismiss them.
- Be fair and avoid bias at all costs. Demonstrating integrity is one of Technical Officials greatest assets.
- Be confident and open; don't be defensive or try to justify actions. Use the facts presented to clarify the decision.
- Be polite, professional and firm with an assertive manner. Deal with unacceptable behaviour firmly and quickly.

Remember that the majority of conflict occurs not because of what was said, but the tone in which it was said!

Working with other Officials

Swimming has a range of officiating roles that are undertaken to stage every competition. Technical Officials need work as a team, to co-operate and communicate with colleagues, to ensure the successful running of an event.

To be an effective "team", Technical Officials need to demonstrate ability to:
- Co-operate with others
- Communicate with other officials and swimmers, coaches etc.
- Share information with others.
- Support one another.

Co-operation between the Technical Officials leads to the efficient running of the meet and conveys to the swimmers that they are in control of the situation. Each Technical Official is reliant on the other to a certain degree and a knowledge of the different positions and their requirements is advantageous. (Refer to General Principles of Officiating – Module 2)

Communication between the Technical Officials prior to, during and after the competition contributes to a sense of certainty for the swimmers and reduces the risk of confusion during the competition.

Sharing information with other Technical Officials on pool deck can add to the accuracy of each official's decisions. Sharing experiences within the team of officials can assist with the development of colleagues.

Mentoring Trainee Technical Officials

Recruiting and training new Technical Officials is an ongoing process within MSA. Mentoring trainees is another important role of the experienced Technical Official, so by sharing experiences, answering queries and leading by example you can greatly assist the development of new officials.

Some suggestions to provoke some thought when mentoring trainee Technical Officials:
- Do not compare the performance of the person you are supervising or mentoring with the performance of someone else. Treat each trainee as an individual and adjust your style accordingly.
- When supervising or mentoring others, relate your real experiences and stories; when doing so, use "I" and not the generic "you" to talk about yourself. This will convey clear accountability, and make the connection more authentic
- Be willing to "lead by example". Set the example, and model the desired behaviour and do it flawlessly. Do not expect the trainees to do something you can't do in front of them.
- Avoid negatives that discourage and exclude, such as "I don't think …." and "You shouldn't …." when speaking. Negatives put people on the defensive. Instead, you want to encourage and include phrases that start with "What if we tried to …." or "Maybe you could …." or "Another option might be …."
- When you do not know the answer to a question, admit it. Offer to find the answer and provide it ASAP.
- Supervising or mentoring someone is not a one-sided initiative. It is a dialogue, a give-and-take, a sharing of ideas and information. You do not have to be the initiator of the process or any given conversation; the trainee can sometimes take the lead.
- Describe why the skill / behaviour, etc. is important. Outline the steps / expectations / objectives / outcomes involved.
- Demonstrating how to perform a procedure improves your skill level - but does nothing to improve the trainee's skill level. So spend more time requiring the trainee to demonstrate his or her skills and provide appropriate feedback.
- Provide encouragement and support each step along the way, giving feedback when appropriate to help build upon each success, no matter how small.
- Praise, praise, praise! Everyone needs to feel appreciated and recognised. No one likes to fail. Help people to fail with their dignity intact and they will take away a positive improvement.
- Sometimes a big warm smile, with eye contact, and telling the other person, "I know you are going to be great!" is all the motivation and help they need in order to shine.
- Work only on first hand data: One of the best ways to lose credibility is to supervise or mentor someone on a performance or behaviour that has been reported to you by a third party.
- Do not be afraid to write R (review) on a log sheet when required. It is better to get it

right at the beginning rather than have to deal with issues for the life of the official.

- Invite the trainee to think back on the experience and discuss lessons learned. Also, discuss implications of the experience for future behaviour.
- End your session by asking the trainee to tell you two or three of the most important things he or she has learned. This will reinforce learning and help build and strengthen their experience.