

Food For Thought for Stroke and Turn Officials

This article was written by Flip Filipelli and appeared in the July 2000 Newsletter "Off The Blocks"

We want to see each session of each meet through to the end with as few problems as possible. Our judging decisions must be quick and within seconds of the finish of the race. Quick and accurate decisions give the impression that we knew what the problem was and that our decision was correct.

We must demonstrate a high standard of judgement and competency. As to rules, it is important that we know all the reasons for the rules and how they inter-relate to one another. That is why the FINA rules are written in short numbered paragraphs. Some FINA rules are cut and dried; others are more loosely worded. If we interpret the rules too liberally, we may write out a potential DQ which has a lot of doubt associated with it.

We are here to judge in such a way as to ensure that no swimmer gains an unfair advantage over another. Please bear in mind that many swimmers at a meet have been training many years to reach the competition. They have gotten up early in the morning, year round, then swum evenings as well. Often in the course of their swimming careers, these athletes put in some 10,000 hours. They swim back and forth, smelling only chlorine, hearing little - seeing not much more than the bottom or the roof of the pool. Many cover between 300 - 500 kilometers per year! Many train long and hard for a race that may be less than 1 minute long! These athletes deserve a high level of officiating - the very best we can give them.

Each Turn Judge's job is to:

1. see that each swimmer swims the full distance of the race in accordance with the rules.
2. be aware of and understand all the aspects of turn judging

Judging is not always "black and white". There is a wide gray area which allows a lot of room to give the swimmer the "benefit of the doubt".

We are not on deck to pass judgment on the quality of the turn; a poor turn may well be within the FINA rules.

Let's look at a few things:

1. before a swimmer touches the wall, he/she is swimming.
2. after a swimmer has touched the wall he/she has stopped swimming.
3. while a swimmer is pushing off the wall he/she has stopped swimming, therefore, the swimming rules don't apply.
4. however, when the swimmer completes his/her push from the wall, he/she resumes swimming and the rules apply.

The cycle =

swim to wall - judge

touch - judge

pushing off wall - don't judge

after leaving wall - judge

How about the environment at touches and turn?

1. ask yourself - "did the wave action cause a lot of disturbance making the touch difficult to see?"
2. ask yourself - "did the swimmer do a "fleeting" touch, which is very difficult to see?"
3. ask yourself - "was the touch unusually brief with a lot of splashing?"
4. ask yourself - "was the splashing so violent that my head and shoulders jerked back and I failed to see the touch clearly?"
5. ask yourself - "while retreating from the splashing, did I perhaps blink at the same time - how clearly did I actually see the touch?"

GOOD TURN JUDGES DANCE WITH THE WATER AND GET WET!!!

(This applies not only to good Turn Judges, but to good Timekeepers as well).

Finally, the word "perfect" does not appear anywhere in the FINA or the Canadian Rules! I have probably never seen a swimmer make a "perfect" turn.

Rules of Stroke exist to regulate fair play. They are designed and written so all swimmers in every race are subject to the same restrictions, limitations and freedoms. They depend on us to interpret and apply the rules and regulations fairly.

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