

The “Professional” Deck Referee -or- It’s more than blowing a whistle!

The “Professional” Deck Referee should:

- **Know the rules** and the official interpretations published by the USA Swimming Rules Committee
- **Read and understand the information in the Meet Announcement**, including warm-up requirements
- **Be on time for each session and officials’ briefing, dressed appropriately in a professional manner.** Be aware that you may be asked to answer questions about rules.
- **Be flexible and adaptable to all procedures made by the Meet Referee, Head Starter, or Head Deck Referee that may differ from the suggested guidelines offered in this document**
- **Confirm assignments, rotations, and invigilating schedule with the Meet Referee or Head Starter**
- **If assigned to invigilate controlled warm-up:**
 - Coordinate with the assigned Starter to observe the pool and enforce compliance with warm-up rules
 - Open pace lanes and racing start lanes at the designated time in accordance with posted warm up procedures (open additional racing start/sprint lanes if demand warrants). Coordinate with the Announcer and Marshals
 - Assist the Starter in checking starting system, starting blocks, and related equipment
 - Review deck set-up in general such as flags, 15M tape, traffic patterns, etc.– quietly alert Meet Referee to any irregularities or safety issues
- **Coordinate with the Meet Referee and other Deck Referees to:**
 - Establish how heats will be run– fly-overs, cleared pool, chase starts, etc.
 - Set with Meet Referee the ideal heat pace or interval for each session
 - If there is an announcer, understand how they will coordinate with the Deck Referee/Starter teams
 - Understand how to handle situations such as the timing system not starting or long delays
 - Confirm how swimmers missing heats will be handled
 - Determine if there are swimmers with disabilities who have requested modification or accommodation
 - Suggested whistle protocol:
 - Short whistles– 4-5 crisp distinct chirps when swimmers in the heat are present and race-ready beside the blocks (Meet Referee may establish a different pace.)
 - Long step up or step in whistle– single tone, steady, 1-2 second long whistle when the swimmers are ready. If possible, resolve any issues before the first long whistle. Make sure the volume is appropriate for the venue. (Don’t blow into anyone’s ear!)
 - Second long whistle for backstroke should be the identical to the first long whistle–
 - With backstroke ledges– when last swimmer has returned to the wall
 - Without backstroke ledges– when last swimmer surfaces
 - Turn the heat over to the Starter when all swimmers are accounted for, either steady on the blocks or settled in the lanes, and there are no apparent issues behind the blocks or with the blocks or ledges.
 - Let the Starter decide when the swimmers are ready to start.
 - Ask the Starter to say “Relax please” or step the swimmers down if any issues can’t be promptly resolved. Remember the outstretched arm does not necessarily close the heat. USA Swimming rules do not specify when a heat is closed.
 - If a heat is asked to relax, consult with the Starter and blow another long whistle to get the swimmers’ attention to step back up on the block or place their feet for a backstroke start.
 - Manage the starting area – timers seated for starts, only current heat swimmer in front of timers, etc.
- **Consult with the Starters:**
 - On their preferred starting position, where you will stand, and how you will turn the heat over to them
 - On protocol to verify potential false starts
 - On any requested accommodation for swimmers with disabilities
 - On how you would want to be advised of problems in the starting area, equipment issues, etc.
 - On how you will resolve common issues like untidy starting block areas (reduce the chaos to a minimum to set the tone for the meet)
 - On any ties in preliminaries that will be resolved with swim offs

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- **Work with the Chief Judges:**
 - To establish procedures for DQ, DFS, and No Show
 - To establish swimmer notification procedures for all disqualifications
 - To be sure they understand the radio protocol
- **Check with the Admin team** after your event to see if any problematic ties need to be resolved for finals seeding. Consider ties for the last and first places in finals heats, for alternates, and any places that could move into contention if there are one or more scratches from, or no shows in, finals. Take into account any restrictions on who can swim in finals or particular finals heats. If problematic ties exist, request another paper copy of the preliminary results. Start working on ties immediately (before scratch deadline.) Find, page, or text the coaches involved and mediate the resolution. If a swim-off is selected, insist it be within the time required by the rules. If another method is selected (one defers to another, a coin toss, or other method), record the result on your copy of the preliminary results, have the coaches initial the resolution, and convey the record to the Admin team. If scratches eliminate the need for tie resolution, inform the coaches. Keep the Starter and CJ in the loop, too.
- **Keep the meet flowing at a predictable pace**, but do not pressure Starters to pick up the pace
- **Try not to turn away from the pool** while a heat is in progress. Watch swimmers through heads up after the start and avoid any paperwork or conversations until after that point
- **Record the start time of each event and ensure the timing system is operating for each heat**
- **At the end of each event, reconcile DQs, no shows, DFSs, and any changes in swimmer lane assignments with the Admin team** according to the methods defined by the MR - either in person or by radio if Admin is in a remote location.
- **Develop your own mental check list** of things to do before, during, and after your duty session. For example:
 - **Before the session:**
 - Check the Meet Announcement and heat sheet:
 - Championship/Circle seeding when the meet has preliminaries
 - Transitions from slowest to fastest and fastest to slowest heats, alternating heats by gender
 - Scheduled breaks between events
 - Check sequence of deck seeded vs pre-seeded events in the session
 - Deck seeded events; verify that the seeding has been distributed
 - Participation of any swimmers with disabilities who have requested accommodation or modification
 - **Before each event:**
 - Check for re-seeds. If any, are they on colored paper? Do the announcer, coaches, officials, and timers have them? Have copies been posted conspicuously for swimmers? Does there appear to be confusion behind the blocks about lane assignments?
 - Ensure the timing console is set to the correct distance whenever change occurs such as from 25Y/50M events
 - Is your Starter (and are you) ready and are CJs and Judges in place?
 - **Before each race:** (All of this should only take a second or two at most)
 - Scan the deck for officials in position and equipment problems (pads hanging, cables in lanes, people leaning on backstroke flag poles, etc.),
 - Glance at the Starter to see if issues have been observed
 - For finals, count the swimmers while parading or being announced
 - Check if timing system has been reset before blowing long whistles (depends on the system used and location of cues, if any)
 - **After the start:**
 - Glance to confirm the timing system started
 - Watch for all heads up and glance at stroke judges for potential 15M violations
 - Move a few meters down the pool (never more than 1 or 2 meters past the backstroke flags)
 - Mark any potential false starts you observed

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- Glance back at start end judges
- Note event start time (if it is the first heat)
- Record empty lanes and radio them in if necessary
- Watch swimmers and judges
- In distance races, check scoreboard (if visible) for missed touches and incorrect counters (use CJ to convey corrections)
- Acknowledge and note any DQs and process them expeditiously
- Move back to start with incoming swimmers at the end of the heat
- Glance at Starter to see if there may be issues with the next heat
- Blow short whistles, etc.
- **After each event:**
 - Check that all DQs have been completely processed (including swimmer or coach notifications)
 - Reconcile DQs, DFSs, No Shows and adjustments with Admin so the event can be closed
 - Check with Admin for potential swim offs and resolve positions for finals
 - Take a well-earned break if scheduled and able to step off deck
 - Return promptly for next up duties, which may include assisting the current Deck Referee
- **Important things to consider:**
 - Be neatly uniformed and project confidence
 - Try to face the pool when standing anywhere near it, even when not on duty
 - Be alert, attentive, focused, calm, professional, and approachable
 - Always be friendly and helpful to coaches, swimmers, and other officials but avoid answering questions that are not your responsibilities and redirect to the Meet Referee
 - Try to take all discussions and emotional issues off-deck and away out of view of coaches, athletes, and spectators
 - If conversations become more in depth or need to move off deck, consider turning the event over to the next up Deck Referee
 - Similarly, be ready to step in when you are next up. Watch and listen so that you don’t need to be summoned.
 - Maintain your sense of humor and professionalism.
- **Remember, the Professional Deck Referee:**
 - Can adapt to meet conditions and needs
 - Is willing to learn
 - Doesn’t read more into the rules than is written, and generously applies common sense, ALWAYS giving swimmers the benefit of the doubt
 - Finds ways (within the rules) to let swimmers compete, and doesn’t over interpret technical or procedural rules
 - Appreciates swimmers, coaches, officials, and volunteers of all levels and interacts with them respectfully on all occasions
 - Is neatly uniformed, looks confident, is competent
 - Advises the Meet Referee and Deck Referees of any non-routine decisions made. If possible, involves them in making those decisions
 - Does the Deck Referee job well and doesn’t overstep those responsibilities unless asked by the Meet Referee
 - Self-evaluates after all shifts, sessions, and meets

Please refer to the Certification Requirements for Deck Referee for information on N2 and N3 evaluations, certification, and recertification. <https://www.usaswimming.org/officials/national-certification-evaluation>