



What does a typical day as a swimming judge look like?

If you've ever wondered what a day as a swimming judge looks like and what it involves, Andrew, one of our club officials talks you through a typical day:

It starts out the same for all swim parents...

On the day of a meet I'll be travelling with my swimmer in that well-known role to all swim parents, that of race chauffeur, so no differently to when I was a spectator. We're looking to arrive in plenty of time for the race warm up. Today's warm up is at 1330. The Referee holds their briefing at the same time, and so officials start turning up at about the same time as parents.

I've had to do a tiny bit more preparation than when I was a spectator, but not a great deal, just putting together a bag with what I'll need for the day; Uniform, licence, stopwatches, poolside shoes and a few other bits.

At the venue:

In the foyer I'll wish my swimmer luck and we go our separate ways (just for now), her to the club area on pool deck, and I go to find the officials room, usually tucked away somewhere in the back of the complex. A few judges are here already, using their time to prepare and be ready for the session. All the judges will be on post for between 2 and 3 hours with limited (if any) time for a comfort break, so it's good to make sure you're ready and have everything on hand that you might need.

The referee holds her briefing while the swimmers warm up, concentrating heavily on the safety aspects of the day and also what procedures she requires from the judges. Meet Referees are all individual and all will have a different brief in terms of detail and length. You get used to the different ones and know what to expect from them. Today I'm allocated to the Timekeeper / Turn Judge role on lane 2, so I know where my next 2 or 3 hours will be spent. I make a note of who my Chief Timekeeper is and where they'll be positioned, in case I have anything to report or have any problems. Just to be social I note the names of the judges in lanes 1 and 3 so I can say hello. At the end of the briefing I get my things together and start to head to poolside. I'm carrying a clipboard with the Lane 2 timing sheet which I was issued by the Chief Timekeeper, this lists all the events and which swimmer I will have on my lane for each heat. I'll also take a small bag to poolside with me, containing a spare stopwatch, spare pens, sweatband, tissues. I claim my seat on lane 2 and drop my bag somewhere dry, and I check the area including the pool for any debris such as broken off pieces of lane rope in the pool, and if necessary I bring that to the attention of the Referee, or I put it right myself where practicable – Often with the help of a pressganged swimmer.

The racing itself:

With the warm up over, the first swimmers head out from the marshalling pens to the start line... given the seeded nature of heats, in early rounds the swimmers will tend to be the smallest and least experienced. This might mean that they need extra help in understanding where to be, when to step onto the blocks etc. Part of the duties at this stage include making sure I have the right swimmer so I'll ask them their name, reassure them they're in the right place, and I'll wish them

luck. I check my watch is in the right mode and is zeroed. Timing is being done at this meet by Automated Officiating Equipment (AOE) so the system (including the touch pads) will be the primary timekeeping, there are also back up buttons (the coiled wires you see officials holding at the end of a race) as the secondary timing, BUT: These can and do fail, so the swimmer could well be reliant on the TK running a manual watch to record that time.

The 3 long whistle blasts signal the start of the first race and calls the swimmers to the blocks. The Referee finally hands control of the race over to the starter with an arm signal. "Take your marks" comes over the speakers. The light and tone start the race and I start my watch, and each judge watches their swimmer get away, hopefully legally – We step up onto the plinth to ensure the first 5 metres of the swim is within regulation for that stroke. When we're satisfied that's the case, we'll signal that by standing down, and the Stroke Judges (walking alongside the pool) take over. This is a good time to check that the stopwatch is running normally and recording the swimmer's time. If I've spotted an infraction, or if my watch hasn't started, I'll remain in place and turn to my Chief Timekeeper to signal that I need assistance, but this time, no problems.

Things happen quite fast, especially in shorter distance races... your next swimmer is there already, you could potentially have to get an errant swimmer into the correct lanes as per the start sheets. We will then concentrate on judging turns, counting laps, and at the right point, recording an accurate finish. We'll press the backup button as the swimmer touches, plus record a manual stopwatch time, and write that time on the lane sheet. This time could be needed in case of a problem with a touchpad or another facet of the AOE.

That 5 metres between the bunting flags and the wall (often marked with red lane ropes) is the zone that a turn judge is looking after. in cases where we see a rule infraction, we'll turn to the Chief Timekeeper and remain standing to signal that we need assistance and may need to make a report. This repeats with each heat of each event of the day... As you might expect, attention is a really key attribute of a judge - It's normal for anyone's attention to drift at times, but the swimmers are relying on us to record their time accurately in case of an AOE failure, and of course all swimmers are deserving of a fair swim from everyone, so we try to maintain that concentration and apply the rules fairly. And do we make many infraction reports? It depends, some sessions are quiet and the swimmers are all in line with the rules, occasionally it can get busier with multiple infractions in a session.

The end of the session:

Finally we're at the last swim of the evening. The swimmer in my lane touches, I record the time, and that's it! I hand in the fully completed lane sheet to the Chief Timekeeper, and head back to the officials room to get my belongings together.

I reunite with my swimmer and we jump in the car for the journey home. On the way we chat about how her swims went, any PBs, other HSC swimmer's notable swims, and whether McDonald's on the way home is an appropriate reward for her day's efforts (!) Sounds familiar... and the day is so similar to being a parent spectator in terms of the time, the key difference (and most positive) being that I've been kept occupied and interested in the whole event, and the time has gone more quickly.