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Officials Newsletter - December 2020

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Officials Newsletter



Greetings From the Chair

Happy Holidays! The snow fell this morning along the Front Range of Colorado making it feel more like the holiday season.

I trust that you and your family are well and are finding ways to be full of hope for the new year. We have much to look forward to with regard to our athletes and the competitions that are scheduled ahead of the big event - Olympic Trials - in 2021. Comparable to the Toyota U.S. Open this past November, being contested in nine different venues, the 2021 TYR Pro Series will begin in January at three different sites: San Antonio, Richmond, and Irvine. It is unfortunate that the pandemic has kept the number of officials on deck to a maximum of 18, but I know we are all committed to keeping everyone safe and healthy. We have the successes of the Toyota US Open sites to rest upon to give us confidence that the protocols work. Thank you to all who were a part of this, especially Lucy Duncan who served as the overall Meet Referee and the site referee in Indy!

Special acknowledgement of the LSC Officials Committees came during the October LSC OC Conference Call when several of the Officials Chairs were recognized for the work that had been done to improve education and mentoring, training methods and materials, advancements and connections.

It is amazing what has been accomplished since the Spring. In this newsletter is yet another example of the creativity of our members. Be sure to read the article from Tim Husson.

Stay safe and enjoy the special moments of the season!

Kathleen

Announcements

January TYR Pro Swim Series - three (3) sites

- Richmond - Amy Hoppenrath
- San Antonio - Trish Martin
- Irvine - Robert Broyles
- Minimal Officials, if possible staffed from the original applicant pool
 - Must have a negative COVID test within 72 hours of arriving
 - Results must be submitted to USA Swimming before arrival
 - Daily Screening will also be conducted

A Word From Our Staff Liaison

Greetings-

I would like to take a moment to thank you for your help and support over the last several months as I have taken on this new role. It has truly been a blessing to work with you all on a daily basis. With that, I look forward to continuing this work into 2021 and beyond!

A few updates from USA Swimming Headquarters:

- The USA Swimming Office will be closed from December 21 to January 4. Responses from staff may be delayed during this time.
- As we head into the new year, please make sure that you are up to date on all membership requirements, including 2021 membership registration, Athlete Protection Training, Concussion Protocol Training, Level-II Background Check, and any LSC requirements.

If you have any questions about the information listed above, please do not hesitate to reach out.

From here in Colorado Springs, I wish you and your families a safe, healthy and happy holiday season!

Best,
Macie McNichols

Toyota U.S. Open Recap

By Lucy Duncan

Traditionally the Toyota U.S. Open is held in early December. In an effort to provide athletes an opportunity to race long course as we enter an Olympic year, the Toyota U.S. Open was moved from one location in early December to nine locations in mid-November. Each site followed health and safety protocols and operated under strict COVID guidelines. The meets were flighted by gender when required.

The change to multiple sites helped offset limits imposed on facilities and provided venues that would require less travel for teams while increasing the number of competitors that could attend. Each site had participant limits that reflected the local guidelines. The format of the meet was also changed to four (4) timed finals sessions instead of prelims/finals. In addition to the Meet Information, each of the sites filed a site-specific Safety Plan that outlined the steps being taken to safeguard athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers, and spectators. Waivers were required for swimmers as well as all other meet personnel.

Results from all sites were combined by USA Swimming and published in a comprehensive results report. Overall, 1,136 athletes competed. Three new Toyota U.S. Open Meet Records were established, as well as three National Age Group records. Across all sites there were 45 NEW Olympic Trials qualifiers. Richmond led all sites with 12 new qualifiers, followed by Greensboro with nine, Indianapolis with seven, and Des Moines with five. Sarasota had four, and Huntsville and Irvine both had three, while Beaverton had two.

Most importantly, we provided opportunities for athletes and coaches to attend safe and highly competitive events after months of training and waiting for such an opportunity.

Virtual Scratch Table

By Tim Husson (Potomac Valley Swimming)

The old saying "Necessity is the mother of invention" got a serious workout this year as many of our long-standing processes had to be modified due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While preparing for the

Potomac Valley 18&U Winter Championships, we needed to find way to maintain social distancing and minimize physical contact. The scratch table at a championship meet is a place that athletes and coaches visit frequently and there is significant contact with the administrative personnel at the scratch table. To reduce personal contact, we developed a [Virtual Scratch Table](#).

Some of the key elements of a scratch table that we needed to replicate were a secure, auditable way of accepting scratches and a way for all to see the progress of the scratches. The first thing that we did was create a specific email account (scratch@pvswim.org) that would receive the scratches and provide the proof of scratch. When an athlete or their coach submitted a scratch they received an auto-reply email letting them know the scratch had been received. After the administrative official processed the scratch and updated the results sheet on the Virtual Scratch Table, a reply was sent to indicate the scratch had been processed. If the scratch email was from an athlete, their coach was copied on this reply.

Instead of a printed copy of the prelims results, results were exported to a CSV and made accessible to all in a Google Sheet, which can be seen in the example [here](#). Instead of hovering around an actual table and results on paper, coaches and swimmers could track updates from their phones on the Virtual Scratch Table. Simply by clicking on the event number on the Virtual Scratch Table anyone could see the scratches that had been processed, much like they would do at a physical scratch table with a physical results sheet. [Event 21 provides a good example showing processed scratches](#).

This process allowed coaches and athletes to track the progress of scratches from anywhere, even if they were no longer at the pool. In more than one instance a coach was contacting their athlete to inform them that they had scratched into finals before the Administrative Referee could get to the coach. While there was a learning curve to the new process, the coaches appreciated the ability for an athlete to scratch without physically visiting the scratch table, as well as the ability to monitor scratches without hovering over the scratch table.

The scratch@pvswim.org email was also used as a Virtual Scratch Box where athletes and coaches could scratch from prelims events. The scratch card and receipt copy were replaced by the email and the reply.

In addition to a virtual scratch box and virtual scratch table, positive check-in was accomplished using a [Google Form](#). Since the positive check-in deadline was the day before the events, using an online form made check-in more accessible to athletes and coaches. The form was customized to check-in athletes entered in each event. Coaches were able to ask the Administrative Referee if their swimmer had checked in.

We already have ideas for streamlining and improving these processes. We hope to try this again soon and hope it will become the beginnings of a new normal.

Words from our Athlete Representatives on the National Officials Committee

Shelby Mullendore

My journey on the National Officials Committee began three years ago when I was nominated to the committee along with my good friend, Jack Swanson. I was more than excited to have been elected to a national committee, as I felt like I was ready to make an even bigger impact within USA Swimming governance. I had no idea what to expect from the Officials Committee because my only interaction with officials had been trying to avoid getting disqualified by them for the past 11 years. Little did I know that this would be one of the most informative and influential experiences of my career within USA Swimming!

One of the biggest changes of transitioning from an LSC athlete representative to a National athlete representative was learning how to work with people who I had never met before. I had become very comfortable working with the Board of Directors in my home LSC, Midwestern, but this opportunity provided the chance to learn from people who have been mentors in the officiating world for many years. I vividly remember showing up to my first National Officials Committee meeting in Nashville, Tennessee in the spring of 2018 and having no idea who the other members were, let alone what their experience levels were. After two great days of meetings, dinners, and a trip to the Grand Ole Opry, I finally had a sense of what makes the officials' community so fun to be a part of. The group that I worked with that year had experience ranging from working at local meets to officiating at Olympic Trials and World Championships, and everything in between. They were very passionate about the tasks that we were asked to perform and extremely helpful in teaching me everything that I needed to know about officiating. That first committee meeting laid the groundwork for my love of learning everything there is to know about officiating and governance that still exists today.

Furthermore, I have developed so much respect and appreciation for all that officials do for the sport. A majority of the work that they do is done behind the scenes and not many people understand everything that goes into being an official. I learned just about every job there is in officiating from being on this committee, from AO and AR to stroke/turn judges and starters. The various jobs taught me that officials are some of, if not the most, knowledgeable people on a pool deck at any given time, and this doesn't get recognized enough. As I highlighted in a presentation at last year's National Convention, all officials in USA Swimming are volunteers, meaning they spend countless hours on hot and cramped pool decks FOR FREE. As an athlete, I realized that us athletes do not thank officials enough, and I was so glad to have been able to make a whole presentation dedicated to celebrating all officials.

As my athletic career comes to a close within the next year or so, I have so much to be grateful for. It is difficult to put into words how much this experience with the Officials Committee has meant to me, as I have learned from some of the best in the business what it means to give your all into something you are passionate about. I wouldn't be where I am today without all of the mentors, who I now consider as friends, that have worked with me on this committee. I am looking forward to continuing to shape the future of USA Swimming in all aspects, and I thank all of the officials in USA Swimming for fostering the absolute best environment for all swimmers!

Rhys Winter

Last January, I had the incredible opportunity of going to my first National Officials Committee meeting in Denver. Most of my previous experience in the USA Swimming governance structure had been as an athlete representative, working primarily with high school and college students that were either LSC reps like me, or members of the Athletes Executive Community. Going into this meeting, I had little knowledge of what officials did, besides that they were the scary people at the end of my lane at meets that had the power to DQ me with a simple raise of a hand. I also had little experience working with adults, so I figured this would be a boring meeting that was strictly business and no fun. Oh boy was I wrong!

The first thing I learned was that officials (and essentially everyone on the dry side of the sport) use a lot of acronyms! I'm still slowly learning what OME, OQM, AO, etc. all mean! I eventually put it behind me that I wouldn't be able to understand the lingo of half the conversations, and tried my best to be a proactive member of discussion. I soon realized that the scary people in white collared shirts were actually a really fun group of people! It became very apparent that this group was just as enthusiastic about officiating as athletes were about swimming. Listening in on their conversations, I learned that these people enjoyed spending their weekends on pool decks across the country, and that it wasn't just something they were forced to do because their teams needed to meet a quota on the number of officials. Just like all the athlete representatives I have met throughout the years, the members of the Officials Committee were just as passionate about the sport as I am, and they loved volunteering their time to help improve the lives of officials throughout the nation.

The next thing I learned is that officials like to have fun! Throughout the years as an athlete, I never really thought officials enjoyed their time at meets. I just kind of assumed they kept to themselves and got yummy looking hospitality food that the swimmers tried to sneak in and grab. Sitting at a table with

10 officials, I realized that they were all close friends with each other. One of my favorite parts about being an athlete is meeting people from other teams and LSC's, some of whom have become my best friends, despite being my competitor in the pool. Seeing that these kinds of relationships were also being made in the officials community was awesome to see.

And finally, I learned that officials have to do a lot more work behind the scenes than I ever imagined! I didn't realize making a DQ was such an extensive process with lots of people double checking the validity of the DQ. I also didn't know how in depth simply training an entry level official was. Learning about all the hard work that officials do, without ever being acknowledged by the athletes you do it for, makes me so incredibly grateful.

So on behalf of athletes, thank you for all the time you put into the sport. Thank you for being so passionate about making sure we have fair and equitable competitions. And thank you for having just as much fun as we athletes do!



Officials Excellence Award

George Mathes - Wyoming Swimming

George Mathes is the Officials Chair for Wyoming Swimming. In addition to his USA sessions, George enjoys working HS meets where he recently joined his father who has been officiating for 50 years! In his brief tenure as Officials Chair, he has had the enviable task of incorporating MANY new officials due to the implementation of a policy requiring teams to provide officials at each meet. He has risen to the challenge of attracting, training and advancing officials in a brief period of time to meet the new LSC requirement. From observing several of Wyoming's meets, it is clear that not only are officials being offered appropriate opportunities to advance, but that all officials are well trained and versed in the rules. George has made it simple to attend clinics, usually offering S/T, Starter, Referee, and AO at multiple meets throughout the year. Officials are engaged in these opportunities to learn as well as teach and mentor.

George has reached out to officials from outside the LSC to assist and provide education on best practices. Recently Wyoming hosted its first OQM, providing the opportunity for advancement and implementing "national deck" protocols in all positions. It was a great opportunity for Wyoming officials to receive reinforcement and observe and institute "best practices" in a few short months.

George's inclusive style and relaxed demeanor make him easily approachable, and his thoughtful use

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of outside resources make him a model for keeping an LSC on the right path. The respect afforded him by coaches, officials, and meet personnel is well deserved.

Talk to us today

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