

USA Swimming National Open Water Officials Clinic – 3-6 June 2010, Long Beach, CA

Michael Downs was selected to attend the clinic (at USA Swimming/Virginia Swimming expense).

Kimberly Schlimgen also attended the clinic (at her own expense).

Michael and Kimberly officiated both the 10K and 5K National OW Championships.

The purpose of the clinic was to bring together interested officials from across the country to 1) learn about OW officiating, 2) officiate the OW National Championships, and 3) participate in the Global OW Swimming Conference with the intent that the experience gained would be shared with other officials in the LSCs.

Seventeen officials (from 16 LSCs) attended the clinic as selectees of USA Swimming; two officials (from 2 LSCs) attended on their own.

The clinic began on Thursday afternoon with the 10K OW National Championships Pre-Race Technical Meeting. The briefing (attended by swimmers, coaches, officials, and race organizers) covered the requirements / timeline for race preparation and conduct, course setup, rules, and team selection procedures. After the meeting, we attended an Officials Reception/Dinner. Following dinner, we participated in the 10K Officials Briefing. The briefing covered philosophy of OW swimming officiating, rules, position descriptions/responsibilities, assignments, and timeline.

On Friday morning, we assembled at the Long Beach Marine Stadium (created for the 1932 Olympics rowing events). We conducted registration and assisted in meet set-up/preparation (Michael was in charge of the wristband-timing chips station; Kim was in charge of the registration station). We also observed the numbering station and attended the final briefing prior to the race. At the registration station, swimmers checked in with their IDs and received their race tickets (these tickets identified the swimmers and got them into all the stations and the start area). Officials also checked swimmers' fingernails and toenails for length. At the wristband station, we attached pre-assigned timing chips to the wristbands and put them on the swimmers (2 each). The chips were supposed to activate at the finish to help determine the order. Unfortunately, they didn't work very well (USA Swimming is looking at using better technology, like that used at marathon road racing, in the future). At the numbering station, we put 4" black numbers on the swimmers' shoulders and arms using block stamps and meat dye – it worked really well. After registration, swimmers put on Vaseline/grease and attended the final briefing (race course confirmation, rules review, weather/marine forecast, start/finish procedures, feeding procedures, and emergency procedures). We officiated during the race (Michael was the videographer; Kim was Assistant Referee - Feeding Platform). Michael videotaped each swimmer as they were introduced and entered the start area (making sure to get their faces, race numbers, and cap/suit colors). He also videotaped the finish of all swimmers (to assist finish judging and ensure everyone was accounted for). Kim worked on the feeding platform – making sure swimmers/coaches didn't violate the rules. There were 2 DQs for gaining assistance while feeding. Five (5) swimmers did not complete the race (the water was 62 degrees). After the race, we participated in the Officials Debriefing. We discussed each official's position/responsibility and got their feedback on the experience (what went well, what didn't). We had a hearty discussion about whether DQs should have been made at the feeding station given that the rules don't have a feeding station judge identified. We decided that the Meet Referee has the authority to assign Assistant Referees with authority to make calls as necessary – which he did during the Officials Briefing the night before. (The 2010 Legislative Package includes a recommended change to the rules clarifying this situation).

On Saturday morning, we attended a workout at the National OW Select Camp and had a very enlightening conversation with Rick Walker, National OW Team Head Coach. He talked to us about the camp and its goals, safety during races (what to watch for that might indicate a swimmer in distress and our responsibility as officials to pull swimmers from the race – a discussion we had the evening before based on a swimmer that a coach ultimately pulled during the 10K), a few stories from past championships, and the apparent race strategies of some of the top swimmers in the championships. Afterwards, we attended the Global Open Water Swimming Conference. The conference was geared more toward swimmers and organizers of large events. We attended a presentation from Great Britain about the Great Swim Series – 1-mile open water swims across Great Britain and Ireland that are attracting thousands of swimmers. These are more or less fun/fitness swims, but they are run like regular OW swims. The presentation touched on some of the planning/execution, but was focused more on the marketing aspects. We were going to participate in the OW Rules and OW officiating discussions, but they were cancelled (presenter unavailable). Before dinner, we participated in the 5K National OW Championships Pre-Race Technical Meeting. The briefing (attended by swimmers, coaches, officials, and race organizers) covered the requirements / timeline for race preparation and conduct, course setup, rules, and team selection procedures. Following dinner, we participated in the 5K Officials Briefing. The briefing covered position descriptions/responsibilities, assignments, and timeline.

On Sunday morning, we again assembled at the Long Beach Marine Stadium. We didn't have any registration or meet set-up/preparation responsibilities as we were preparing for our officiating jobs. We observed the registration, wristbands/timing chips, and numbering stations (they operated the same as Saturday with a few tweaks from lessons learned) and attended the final briefing prior to the race. We officiated during the race (Michael was the Men's Referee; Kim was the Women's Assistant Referee and Starter). We both had our own boats/captains (they were very good, attentive, and helpful). As the Men's Referee, Michael was in charge of the race and generally followed the lead pack of swimmers. There were a lot of position changes, but most were without egregious contact. One Yellow Card was issued to a swimmer near the end of the race for pulling another swimmer under water. As Women's Assistant Referee, Kim generally followed the main pack and kept up with the stragglers. There were no calls. As Referee and Assistant Referee, we kept track of the number of swimmers, observed for rule violations and safety issues, adjudicated any calls, and assisted in the recording of the order of finish. As Starter, Kim was responsible for the in-water starts of both races. After the race, we participated in the Officials Debriefing. Both 5K races were very fast, but pretty smooth – no real issues. Everyone did a good job preparing and executing. It's much easier when you have enough officials / volunteers and, especially, working boats and equipment.

The National Officials Committee is working on a National OW Officials Certification – probably won't be rolled out for another year – not sure why the holdup. Michael and Kim will be proposing an LSC OW Official Certification at the next LSC Officials Committee Meeting. It will most likely consist of a clinic, followed by the online test, followed by working an OW meet. We think it's important to standardize our approach and certify officials to work our sanctioned OW events and prepare our officials for our LSC OW Championships.

The clinic was enjoyable and educational. Although we were the most experienced OW officials attending (except the Meet Referee, Mark McCaw and the 2 Clinicians, John Kinney and Mike Salztien), we still learned from everyone and hope to bring that experience to those in Virginia Swimming that are interested.

I want to thank Virginia Swimming for nominating me to attend the clinic and providing the funds for the trip.