

VSI Officials Committee Report

31 December 2008

- Bruce Stratton, Chair of the USA-S Rules & Regulations Committee issued an interpretation of what constitutes the initiation of the first arm pull in breaststroke. The interpretation has been distributed and posted to the website.
- Virginia Swimming was well-represented by nine officials at the Short Course Junior Nationals in Austin. Those making the trip included Pat Donohue, Michael Downs, Tom Elliott, Kevin Hogan, Kim Schlimgen, Jessica Simons, Terry Randolph, Bob Rustin, and John Thompson.
- LSC Championship Meet Staffing
 - Pat Donohue will be the Meet Referee for the 2008 VSI Short Course Senior Championship meet.
 - Tom Elliott will be the Meet Referee for the 2008 VSI Short Course Age Group Championship meet.
- The question of whether or not we should allow the swimming of two swimmers per lane in distance events has been raised within the committee. The committee is about evenly split on whether or not this practice should be allowed, although Bruce Stratton has indicated that it is legal. A summary of the offered opinions is attached.

Action needed: Recommend that this question taken up by the BOD with input from the appropriate committees.

- The Officials Committee believes that under defined circumstances it is appropriate to reimburse the Meet Referee and Administrative Referee at our Age Group and Senior Championship meets for their lodging expenses. A draft proposed amendment to the VSI Policies and Procedures is attached.

Action needed: The BOD needs to take act on the proposed amendment.

Swimming two per lane in distance events

Issue as raised from an Officials Committee member:

"I believe we need to recommend a policy adoption to the BoD that VSI NOT allow swimming 2 swimmers per lane in VSI sanctioned meets. It is patently unfair to the athletes to do this, never required/warranted, and is a result of poor meet planning/management. If we can't agree to do this or if the BoD fails to pass it, the Officials Committee needs to publish a protocol for handling this situation."

The issue was discussed among the members of the Officials Committee via e-mail and the committee was about evenly split on whether or not the practice should be prohibited. The following is a summary of the comments on both sides of the issue:

In favor of prohibiting the practice:

- Believe it is unfair because the swimmers deserve to swim unhindered in their own lanes.
- We are setting up a practice that does not allow for the best competitive environment.
- Believe we allow the practice because of poor meet planning and management; if we want more distance opportunities we should plan more distance sessions/meets.
- Believe it violates the rules (lane width).
- Difficult to count number of laps swum.
- Concerned about the safety of the practice

In favor of allowing the practice:

- Would rather see the swimmers get to swim rather than have some of them not swim, or the event not be swum at all.
- Allow, but not in championship meets.
- Allow, but we need a protocol for doing so.
- Do not agree that this is an unfair practice, but believes that while not optimal, it does afford more swimmers an opportunity to swim.
- No more unsafe than having multiple swimmers in a lane for practice or warm-ups.
- Believe that it has been pulled off with very good planning
- "Never" and "must not" lock us into a position that may remove needed flexibility

We also obtained the following information on the rules, insurance, and safety perspectives.

Opinion of Bruce Stratton, Chair of the USA-S Rules & Regulations Committee

"There are no issues from an insurance standpoint. While I agree that swimming two to a lane may be somewhat unfair to some swimmers, no matter how well we attempt to plan and management meets, the situation is going to occur where the only way you can accommodate all the swimmers entered into a distance event is to swim two to a lane for at least some of the heats. If you get to the meet and the alternatives are to force some athletes to scratch the event or swim two to a lane, 999 coaches out of 1,000 will chose swimming two to a lane. Although we would like to do everything possible to avoid the situation, when it comes up, the referee needs to have the ability to allow swimming two to a lane. If you need further clarification, please let me know."

From Carol Burch, USA-S, in response to question about insurance

“I am going to forward this e-mail to Bruce Stratton (Chair of the Rules Committee) and Jim Sheehan (Chair of the Officials Committee) to see what they say. There are no restrictions from the insurance side of things but I'll get a reading from Bruce and Jim.”

From Jim Sheehan, Chair of the USA-S Officials Committee

“While it is not the optimal situation, I've heard of it being done from time to time. I can see it being done in unusual situations (e.g. the meet had delays due to weather and the only way to get the swims in before the host loses the pool is to swim two per lane) but I don't believe anyone should plan on doing it when setting up a meet.”

From Allan Meier, Chair of the USA-S Safety Committee as obtained by David Strider while at the convention.

“I talked briefly with Mr. Allan Meier, Chairperson of the USA-S Safety Committee, at the Convention this week, regarding his thoughts on the two per lane in the distance events. Allan stated that the Safety Committee had not addressed this, and expressed concern that such practice should be avoided, if at all possible, but there may be situations (unpredictable delays resulting in much longer time lines at meets, incoming bad weather for outdoor meets) where the two per lane may be done to ensure that all the swimmers could get the swim in... The Safety Committee was not planning to issue a recommendation for or against the above.. I believe Allan's overall feelings on this issue were similar to that of Jim's and Bruce's. Since many of the swimmer's were used to circle swimming, the coaches would need to understand and communicate to their swimmers, that each swimmer needed to stay in her / his half of the lane for the entire swim.”

Summary:

Swimming two per lane is not prohibited by the rules, nor is it prohibited by our insurance carrier. Nonetheless, concerns have been raised about the appropriateness of the practice. It would be appropriate for the BOD to review the practice with additional input from the Technical Planning Committee, Age Group Committee, Senior Committee, and Safety Committee. If the practice is allowed to continue, the Officials Committee could then provide the applicable guidance. The following are issues that might be considered:

- Is the practice best restricted to an older group of swimmers? Should younger swimmers who are perhaps more likely to swim in less than a straight line be excluded from the practice? If the answers to these questions are yes, then what age?
- Should the practice be allowed in both long course and short course competition (the logistics of counting laps is easiest in long course)?
- Should the practice be allowed in all types of meets including championship meets or should some meets have restrictions?
- If we prohibit the practice for planning purposes (ex. up to 3 heats will be swum with a limit of 24 swimmers in an 8 lane pool but NOT up to 3 heats will be swum with a limit of 48 swimmers in an 8 lane pool) do we also prohibit it if special circumstances arise (a storm front is moving in and swimming 2 per lane likely means that we can get in all the swims)?
- The practice is not compatible with automatic timing (pads) although it can easily be accomplished with semi-automatic timing (buttons) if two timing systems are available. Does the use of semi-automatic or manual (watch) times influence the decision?

Proposed Amendment to VSI Procedures, Section C. CHAMPIONSHIP MEET MANAGEMENT

Insert the following paragraph as #8, renumber current paragraph #8 as paragraph #9.

8. Virginia Swimming will reimburse the assigned Senior Champs and Age Group Champs Meet Referees and/or Administrative Referees for reasonable lodging expenses when the individuals live more than 50 miles from the meet venue. If of the same sex the individuals are to share a room; if of different sex or if only one individual requires lodging, an additional official may be assigned to the room(s). Reimbursement will not be available if the individual shares the room with family members. Reimbursement will normally not be made for the night before competition commences or the night the competition concludes, unless unusual circumstances prevail and approval is obtained from the General Chair. To receive travel expenses reimbursement, the Meet Referee and/or Administrative Referee shall submit a completed Virginia Swimming Reimbursement Form to the LSC Officials Chair for approval no later than 30 days after completion of the meet for which reimbursement is requested.

Comments-

If approved this would be an unfunded mandate at this point. It has previously been suggested that this expense be included as a meet expense when calculating meet fees (the committee supports this position). If this were to be the case then the language might need to be changed to "Virginia Swimming, or the local host club if the meet is hosted by a club,"

Would not ordinarily reimburse for the night before a meet, but this is not currently an issue as all our championship meets start with distance events on the evening of the first day of the meet. Thus, any travel could be done during the day. If we went to a three day format with competition starting the morning of the first day we could approve this as an exception as needed (someone traveling from Richmond to Charlottesville could readily do this prior to an AM start; traveling from northern Virginia to Blacksburg would likely require arrival the evening before).

We would also not ordinarily reimburse for the night the competition concludes, but this could also approved as an exception (a four hour drive starting at 9:00 pm on the last day of the meet may not be a smart thing to encourage).