

"LEAD/LAG" COVERAGE FOR STROKE JUDGES

By Joel Black

At swim meets conducted in a fifty meter venue we may hear the remark, "The stroke judges are using "Lead/Lag" coverage." What is this, and how does it work?

"Lead/Lag" is a method of coordinating the actions of two stroke judges on the same side of a fifty meter pool, in an effort to obtain consistent observation of all competitors in their jurisdiction during a race. Typically, prior to a race which involves the 15-meter mark, one judge is positioned on the lane 1 side of the pool at the 15-meter mark. Let's call him or her judge "A". A second judge is positioned on the same side of the pool between the 15-meter mark and the start end of the pool. Let's call him or her judge "B". There are also two stroke judges in the same positions on the lane 8 side of the pool.

Once the race has started and the swimmers are in the water, judge "B" observes the initial elements of the swim for conformity with the rules and within the jurisdiction instructed by the referee. As the swimmers pass, judge "B" turns and follows walking slightly behind the field toward the 15-meter mark. As the swimmers approach the 15-meter mark judge "B" begins to slow his/her walk. Judge "A" is in position to observe that all swimmers have conformed to the rules of the swim concerning the mark and as they pass, turns and follows them down the course toward the turn end walking ahead (Lead) of judge "B"(Lag). As the swimmers and judges approach the turn end of the pool, judge "B" stops at the turn end 15-meter mark, while judge "A" continues the observation into the turn. Judge "A" observes all swimmers through the turn and the initial action of the second length toward the 15-meter mark. As the swimmers pass the 15-meter mark of the turn end, judge "B" falls in slightly behind the swimmers and assumes the "Lead" ahead of judge "A" who now becomes "Lag." This type of coordinated action continues until the race is over. At the end of the race the "Lag" judge has followed the trailing swimmers up to the position of the "Lead" judge and the race finishes.

Frequently in the 200 meter races and the 400 meter Individual Medley, the swimmers will separate to a considerable extent. This separation is also noted with younger and inexperienced swimmers in the 50 and 100 meter distances. When swimmer separation occurs, the stroke judges will also separate from each other in order to maintain consistently balanced observation of the field. When this occurs we must remember to continue scanning all lanes, even the empty ones, so that we do not narrow our focus upon only one or two swimmers. Slight modifications are also made for breaststroke events when the 15-meter mark is not a consideration (both judges continue down the pool to observe the turns), and freestyle events when judges do not walk along the side of the pool.

With experience, "Lead/Lag" becomes a comfortable method of officiating for two officials. The real "fun" begins when a television camera and dolly on a track with a three or four person crew shares one of the sides of the pool!! Coordination of movements between all parties is imperative. However, this discussion must be saved for another time.

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