



# A Guide to TIMEKEEPING

# *Welcome!*

Thank you for joining a large group of volunteers who are an essential part of all swim meets. The following information is intended to help you understand what is involved in being a Timekeeper.

## GENERAL

### **Governance of the Sport of Swimming**

Swimming is controlled by an international organisation called FINA (or Fédération Internationale de Natation for the really curious).

FINA delegates its controlling authority to national bodies, in our case Swimming New Zealand (SNZ).

In its turn SNZ delegates to a regional body and ours is Swimming Auckland (Auckland Swimming Association). Swimming clubs in Auckland are affiliated to this regional body.

All recognised swim meets in New Zealand are run under the rules set down by FINA and by SNZ, and also by Swimming Auckland where applicable.

### **Membership**

Qualified officials are expected to be members of Swimming Auckland. This is done by being a financial member of a Club or of Swimming Auckland.

### **Requirements of Officials**

All good swimming technical officials (Timekeepers, Inspectors of Turns, Judges of Stroke, Starters, Referees, Recorders, Marshals) must:

- have a positive attitude
- be fair, consistent and accurate in what they do
- be knowledgeable in their role and perceptive
- be tolerant to stress

### **Role of the Timekeeper**

Timekeeping is the role in which most people are introduced to officiating.

It is a key role - it is responsible for the fundamental measure of a swimmer's performance – their time.

It is just as important to the club swimmer as it is to a national champion.

Times are measured to 1/100<sup>th</sup> of a second in swimming and this accuracy can determine the breaking of an existing record.

At a club level, for swimmers new to the sport, the time may allow them to qualify for entry into inter-club competition, or progress to a higher level of interclub competition.

Usually three Timekeepers are assigned to each lane as a means of ensuring a swimmer's time recorded is a fair and accurate record of their performance - and swimmers deserve to have their times recorded accurately.

So ..... concentration is required at all times.

### **Timing Systems**

Some regions have electronic timing for their swim meets but even at major meets manual timekeeping is required as a back-up in case of failure.

#### **Timing Systems comprise of:**

- electronic timing - touch pads. These are triggered by the starter's signal and finished by the touching of the swimmer on completion of the race.
- electronic timing – manual. This is the system of buttons pressed by the Timekeepers simultaneously when pressing their manual stopwatches. Times from backup buttons are very important. Please ensure you are familiar with the operation of these buttons.
- stopwatches – manual. These must be digital and record to an accuracy of 1/100<sup>th</sup> of a second.

Use the same hand to start/stop the watch - which hand you use to operate the stopwatch versus the back-up button is your choice.

Accuracy is the essential requirement, so just be sure to also press the electronic back-up button (use the favoured hand at electronic meets) at the finish as well as the stopwatch button!

### **Things to take to a Swim Meet**

A Timekeeper should take a stopwatch (if you have one and prefer to use your own) in good working condition, or alternatively a stopwatch will be provided at the meet by the Chief Timekeeper.

You must also take a **pen** for recording swimmers times from the stopwatch.

It's a good idea to take a bottle of drink as well, since you will be there for the whole session!

### **What to wear?**

SNZ requires technical officials at national level competitions to wear SNZ tops and footwear. Black shorts/long trousers should be worn, or ladies may wear a black skirt instead.

At Swimming Auckland "interclub" swim meets specific clothing is not insisted upon for Timekeepers but a tidy standard of dress is expected.

For all Swimming Auckland Championship swim meets (Auckland Winters, Auckland 12/U, Auckland 13/O, Auckland Opens, Auckland Relays) it would be appreciated if Swimming Auckland uniform (Swimming Auckland tops and Navy pants/skirts) could be worn, as a higher standard of dress is expected.

If you do not have any of this clothing it may be obtained from the Administrator's office. Clothing incentives may be offered from time to time for newly qualified technical officials (Timekeepers, Inspectors of Turns, etc).

Swimming Auckland has therefore adopted a different standard of dress (navy bottoms, white/navy tops) from SNZ but please remember to meet their requirements for SNZ National Championship competitions.

### *Timekeeping – Official FINA Rules*

#### **SW2.9 Timekeepers**

SW2.9.1 Each Timekeeper shall take the time of the swimmers in the lane assigned to him in accordance with SW11.3. The watches shall be certified correct to the satisfaction of the meet Management Committee.

SW2.9.2 Each Timekeeper shall start his watch at the starting signal, and shall stop it when the swimmer in his lane has completed the race. Timekeepers may be instructed by the Chief Timekeeper to record times at intermediate distances in races longer than 100 metres.

SW2.9.3 Promptly after the race, the Timekeepers in each lane shall record the times of their watches on the card, give it to the Chief Timekeeper, and if requested present their watches for inspection. They shall not clear their watches until they receive the 'clear watches' signal from the Chief Timekeeper or the Referee.

SW2.9.4 Unless a video backup system is used, it may be necessary to use the full complement of Timekeepers even when Automatic Officiating Equipment is used.

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SW11.3 Any timing device that is terminated by an official shall be considered a watch. Such manual times must be taken by three Timekeepers appointed or approved by the Member in the country concerned (e.g. SNZ). All watches shall be certified as accurate to the satisfaction of the governing body concerned. Manual timing shall be registered either to 1/100 of a second. Where no Automatic Equipment is used, official manual times shall be determined as follows:

SW11.3.1 If two of the three watches record the same time and the third disagrees, the two identical times shall be the official time.

SW11.3.2 If all three watches disagree, the watch recording the intermediate time shall be the official time.

SW 11.3.3 With only two (2) of the three (3) watches working the average time shall be the official time.

### *Timekeeping – The Reality*

#### **Before the race**

- Timekeepers should arrive at the pool ½ hour before the start of the competition and report to the Chief Timekeeper, who will assign each Timekeeper to a lane, and issue a watch if you do not have one.
- There will usually be three (3) Timekeepers per lane, but sometimes only two (2).
- Digital stopwatches accurate to 1/100<sup>th</sup> of a second are used for manual timekeeping.
- Timekeepers **must** bring a working **pen**.
- If the competition is held at an outdoor venue, then remember the elements – sunscreen and a hat if it's going to be hot, and a coat, and maybe a plastic bag for your papers if it's wet.

- Once the pool is cleared to start the competition, Timekeepers should be seated and ready. Hold the watch in a position most comfortable in the hand. Check the watch is reset to zero before the first race.

### **At the start**

- Do not watch the starter (as this may cause the start to be anticipated and the watch activated before the starting signal etc) but listen for the start sound (which can be by siren, hooter, whistle, or even voice!), or start flash if a strobe light is used.
- It is important that Timekeepers all start their watches on the same signal.
- Start and stop the watch with a finger or thumb movement only. A sweeping movement with the arm looks very dramatic but causes inaccuracy.
- Once the race has started check to make sure the watch is running.
- If a watch malfunctions, does not start, or was started late or early, Timekeepers should stand immediately to attract the attention of the Chief Timekeeper who will assign a replacement Timekeeper or replacement watch for that race.
- Timekeepers should start their watch for every race – even if there is no swimmer in their lane. This is because you may be required for a lane where a Timekeeper's watch has malfunctioned.

### **During the race**

- Sometimes split times are requested, usually only in 800m and 1500m events; these should be recorded separately, usually on the back of the card for the swimmer for that race.
- The first swimmer in a relay can request to be timed separately.
- Timekeepers need to count the laps to be ready to take the time at the finish.
- In long races it is important to periodically check that the watch is still running.

## At the finish

- Check the watch at the last lap before the leading swimmer is due to finish – this allows sufficient time for a replacement should a problem have occurred with the watch.
- During the last few metres Timekeepers should NOT watch the swimmer - the eyes should be focused straight down at the end of the pool (the wall!) in your assigned lane, and the watch stopped when any part of the swimmer touches the wall.
- If the touch is incorrect, this is not the Timekeepers concern.
- When electronic timekeeping is in use, Timekeepers may be asked to operate a button in addition to their watch as part of the system to ensure a time is recorded should a touch fail to activate a touch pad; this button should be used in the favoured hand.
- Care must be taken to stay clear of the top of the touch pad surface to avoid accidental activation of the equipment.
- Timekeepers should maintain their position to ensure an accurate recording of the performance. Do not step back or take the time from the side of the pool to avoid getting wet – it's one of the hazards of the job!
- Once the watch has been stopped, Timekeepers should return to their seats without delay, check their watch and record the time on their programme. Recording individual times in this manner allows for later reference if required, to complete the swimmers timecard or should a problem have occurred in recording times onto the official cards.
- In some big meets, where over the top starts are used there is often insufficient time to record the times onto the card before the next race starts. In this case it is essential to record your time on your programme, as the card can be completed once the next race is in progress.
- The Chief Lane Timekeeper or scribe (the person writing the times onto the card) will record the times on the appropriate form and then determine the official time.
- The only people permitted to inspect times on watches are the Chief Lane Timekeeper, Chief Timekeeper, and the Referee.

- Watches should be reset on the Referee's whistle for the start of the next race.

### **Determining the Official Time**

When electronic timing is used, the times recorded by the touch pads have priority over semi-automatic or manual times (watches) unless there is reason to believe the electronic time is inaccurate or doesn't fairly represent a swimmer's performance (e.g. if the equipment fails to record a swimmer's first touch but records a subsequent touch).

Semi-automatic times are those activated automatically by the start system and terminated by an official (e.g, back-up buttons). These times are determined automatically by the system in the same manner as for watches but have precedence over manual times.

### **For Manual Times**

- If all three watches have the exact same time, then this is the official time.
- If only two watches agree (i.e. the 3<sup>rd</sup> disagrees) the official time is that of the two watches with the same time.
- If all three watches disagree, the watch having the middle time is the official time.

If for any reason there is a malfunction with one of the watches or buttons and only two times are recorded, the times will be averaged and this will be recorded as the official time for that lane.

BUT ..... this time should be shown in the results with an asterisk (\*) because the time averaged from only two watches cannot be used to claim a record.

### **Unofficial Times**

Swimmers will frequently ask you for their time when they come to retrieve their clothing from the baskets beside you. The official time can be declared only by the Referee, so make it clear to the swimmer that the time you are giving to them is unofficial, and expect a thank you.

## *Chief Timekeeper – Official FINA Rules*

### **SW2.8 Chief Timekeeper**

SW2.8.1 The Chief Timekeeper shall assign the seating positions for all Timekeepers and the lanes for which they are responsible. There



shall be three (3) Timekeepers for each lane. If Automatic Officiating Equipment is not used there shall be two (2) additional Timekeepers designated, either of whom shall be directed to replace a Timekeeper whose watch did not start or stopped during an event, or who for any other reason is not able to record the time. When using three (3) digital watches per lane, final time and place is determined by time.

SW2.8.2 The Chief Timekeeper shall collect from the Timekeepers in each lane a card showing the times recorded and, if necessary, inspect their watches.

SW2.8.3 The Chief Timekeeper shall record or examine the official time on the card for each lane.

### *Chief Timekeeper – Things to Know*

#### **When**

The Chief Timekeeper should arrive at the pool 1 hour before the start time and ensure there are sufficient Timekeepers – three (3) Timekeepers for each lane and two (2) additional Timekeepers to replace a Timekeeper whose watch does not start, or stops during an event, or who for any other reason is not able to record the time.

#### **What**

The Chief Timekeeper:

- must report to the Referee upon arrival.
- allocates Timekeepers to lanes and appoints one Timekeeper as Chief Lane Timekeeper. Each Timekeeper may also be allocated an identification number. The Chief Lane Timekeeper should be the most experienced person in each lane. Once all lanes are assigned, qualified Timekeepers should then be assigned to lanes, working from the centre out to ensure experience is spread as evenly as possible across all lanes.
- issues deck cards or time sheets for recording the times from watches.
- check that all watches are running once a race has started and assign any spare Timekeeper to replace one whose watch has not started or has malfunctioned during the race.
- time the first swimmer to finish (from the end of the pool, not the side).

- collects all lane deckcards for the race and checks them for proper completion including determination of the official time.
- take deck cards to the recorder.
- sign any regional record applications made (where manual timing only has been used). Records require that there must be three (3) times for the lane, so if a watch malfunctions at the finish the Chief Timekeeper's time can be used as the 3rd watch if the time was taken on that lane.

### *Chief Lane Timekeeper – Some Points*

#### **The Chief Lane Timekeeper:**

- keeps track of the number of laps swum in a race.
- checks that the right swimmer is in the lane for the event/heat.
- verifies the times recorded by the watches in that lane.
- records these times on the deck card.
- determines the official manual time.
- initials the slip before handing it to the Chief Timekeeper.
- reports to the Chief Timekeeper any consistent irregularities that occur with a watch or Timekeeper in that lane.

Times must be recorded as minutes, seconds and hundredths – e.g. 1.07.91 sec, not 67.91 sec.

Averaged times are not rounded – any digits more than 2 decimals are simply not recorded (e.g. 37.92 and 37.87 on 2 watches. Add 92 + 87 = 179 divided by 2 = 89.5 so averaged time is 37.89).

## SAMPLE QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

*If you can answer these questions then you should apply to Swimming Auckland Technical Committee for examination for the Swimming Auckland Timekeepers qualification. Well done!*

**Q. What is the requirement regarding stopwatch accuracy?**

A. Digital stopwatches accurate to 1/100<sup>th</sup> (or 0.01) seconds are to be used.

**Q. What do you bring with you to a swim meet and what should you wear?**

A. Bring a stopwatch (if you have one and prefer to use your own) and a pen. Wear whites if possible.

**Q. When should your watch be checked for normal function and accuracy?**

A. At least annually and replace batteries if necessary.

**Q. Why are 3 watches allocated to each lane?**

A. In case a regional record is broken.

**Q. Which time is the official watch time when 3 watches are used?**

A. The middle time, or should 2 or all 3 watches be the same then those times will be recorded.

**Q. The programme has no swimmer in your lane for a particular race and you have no deck card for that race but a swimmer starts in the lane – what do you do?**

A. Take the time and get the swimmer's name and record info on your programme for that event / heat / lane. Inform the Chief Timekeeper who should then provide a slip for you on which to record the race details and time swum.

**Q. A swimmer stands up in the middle of a race. What do you do?**

A. Leave your watch running until the swimmer either completes the race or exits the water without completing the race.

**Q. As a Timekeeper, what do you do if in your opinion a swimmer has broken a swimming rule?**

A. Nothing. You are there as a Timekeeper and have no other responsibility unless directed by the Referee.

- Q. If a swimmer fails to touch the wall or touchpad at the end of a race what do you do?**
- A. Leave your watch running until either the swimmer touches or exits the pool. Immediately inform the Chief Timekeeper who will advise the Referee.
- Q. What do you do if your watch fails to start at the beginning of a race, is started early or late, or stops before a race is completed?**
- A. Signal to the Chief Timekeeper for another running watch by raising your hand or by standing and raising your hand.
- Q. A breaststroke swimmer ends a race by touching with one hand only. What do you do?**
- A. Stop your watch when first contact with the wall or touchpad is made by the swimmer regardless of any possible infringement. It is the Inspector of Turns and Referee's job to observe incorrect touches.
- Q. You do not have a swimmer in your lane. What do you do?**
- A. Start your watch as usual as you may be required on another lane.
- Q. You have a deck card for a race but the race starts and that swimmer is not in the race. What do you do?**
- A. Start your watch as usual, and write on the deck card DNS (i.e. did not swim).
- Q. A swimmer starts a race but does not complete it, either getting out of the pool before the designated race distance is completed or by waiting at one end of the pool until the race is ended. What do you do?**
- A. Leave your watch running until the Referee blows a whistle for the start of the next race, and write on the deck card DNF (i.e. did not finish).
- Q. When do you start your watch?**
- A. Only on the sound of the starting device.
- Q. Do you time a relay race?**
- A. Yes.
- Q. Why must you be qualified as an official?**
- A. All officials must be qualified by examination for regional (e.g. Swimming Auckland) records to be validated. (World and SNZ records are awarded only if recorded by electronic timing).

- Q. Is smoking permitted at a swim meet?**  
A. No. FINA rules do not permit smoking at swim meets.
- Q. Where do you stand to take a swimmer's time at the end of a race?**  
A. You must stand at the end of the lane, looking down at the wall or touchpad. You should not be watching the swimmer coming towards you.
- Q. In 800 and 1500 metre races when do you take split times?**  
A. At the completion of each 100m and record the time on the deck card (usually on the reverse).
- Q. When do you arrive at the pool and to whom do you report?**  
A. You should arrive at least ½ hour before competition starts, and report to the Chief Timekeeper or the Referee if no Chief Timekeeper is available.
- Q. Immediately after the start of a race what should you do?**  
A. Check that your watch has started.
- Q. If all three (3) watches disagree at the end of a race, what time is recorded?**  
A. The middle time, or if two are the same then use that time.
- Q. If only two (2) watches record the time for a race what is the official watch time?**  
A. The times of the two watches are averaged, or if they are the same use that time.
- Q. Has anyone the right to examine your watch?**  
A. The Chief Lane Timekeeper, Chief Timekeeper and Referee are the only persons who may inspect your watches.
- Q. After a race has ended when do you clear your watch?**  
A. Usually when the Referee blows a whistle to signal to swimmers to mount the starting blocks for the next race. The Chief Timekeeper may also tell you.
- Q. As Chief Timekeeper, are there any forms you must sign?**  
A. At manually timed meets (no electronic timing) you should check with the Recorder in case there are record applications. The Chief Timekeeper must sign these.

**Q. As Chief Timekeeper what lane do you time and from where?**

A. Time the first swimmer to finish from the end of the lane. In the case of a watch malfunction on the lanes the Chief Timekeeper can be used as 3<sup>rd</sup> watch in case of a record.

**Q. In a distance freestyle race, when do you take an intermediate time if it is required?**

A. For record purposes part way through the race (e.g. at say 400m or 800m).

**Q. Under what conditions can times be altered?**

A. Unless otherwise stated electronic times are used. If races are not electronically timed the Referee's placings may take precedence over times. Races declared as Timed Finals are those where results are declared on times alone.

**Q. What are your responsibilities as Chief Timekeeper?**

A. Arrive approx. 1 hour before start time, report to the Referee on arrival.

Allocate Timekeepers to lanes

Issue deck cards or time sheets to Timekeepers

Check that all watches are running once a race has started (look for any raised hands)

Time 1<sup>st</sup> swimmer to finish

Collect & check deckcards & take to the Recorder

Sign any record applications

**Q. Why should you record your times on your programme?**

A. In case of queries from the Referee, and in case there is insufficient time to complete the deckcard/lane timer sheet, before the start of the next race.

# NOTES

Swimming Auckland acknowledges the development of this booklet by Philippa Bouzaid  
with the technical assistance of Ralph Lumsden



## WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF SPORTS OFFICIATING

Officials make a valuable contribution to the New Zealand sports scene. Without Judges, Referees, Starters, Timekeepers and others, sport in New Zealand just wouldn't happen.

Sport needs officials at all levels. Effective officials help to make sport a healthy positive experience for everyone and great opportunities are open to officials who enjoy sport and are keen to learn.

Training and development for sports officials.

Are you a beginner?

Do you want to improve your performance as an official?

Do you want to build a career in sport?

Whatever your aim SPARC provides support for the training and development of sports officials through a series of resources and short courses that can be delivered either generically through your regional sports trust or as part of your sport specific programme.

SPARC resources to assist the training and development of sports officials include

Becoming a more effective official

People management

Fitness and injury prevention

Legal issues and risk management for sports officials

These resources are packed with information, exercises and general tips to help new officials get started and experienced officials get better. To find out more about how you can improve your officiating skills, contact your regional sports trust, your regional or national sports organisation, or visit SPARC's officials website at [www.sparc.org.nz/officials/](http://www.sparc.org.nz/officials/)

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