



Same Sport...Different Season

By now all of you have completed the Girls Season and are looking forward to the Boys Season. A few of you are currently involved in middle school swimming. For those of you who are just a few comments about the differences. Middle schools may conduct their season whenever their league elects to do so. Usually they elect the period between Girls and Boys seasons with some overlap in the Boys season. Another common time is immediately after the Boys State Finals and finishing prior to final exams for their respective schools.

Middle school seasons are shorter in length with each team participating fewer contests than high school teams. There often is a short number of practice days prior to the team's first meet. Most leagues have a league meet of some form which are usually one day events using multiple officials. The dual meets and league finals do not have a 500-yard freestyle and the butterfly is frequently a 50 as opposed to a 100-yard event. Diving may be a 5 or 6 dive event.

Middle school coaches maybe a varsity coach from one of the high school teams or they may not. Frequently teams are coached by former swimmers or divers that are several years past their own competition career. It is not uncommon to have middle school coaches that are unfamiliar with the current rules. You need to be sure they understand that the meet is being conducted under National Federation rules, with a few modifications which the local league has adopted. During your first meeting with the coaches you should try to assess their background and be prepared to explain to them any new rules that have been implemented since the previous season. Needing to explain changes to all the meet management may be necessary

as well as the rules you will be asking all to operate under. In particular, parents who have had children participating in USS Swimming will need to be advised of the differences that will affect their duties.

Swimmers who have swum under "club rules", most likely USS swimming rules, will have trouble with the Michigan version of the Step Up Start and will require time to adjust to the difference sequence. Many of the swimmers in middle school swimming are new to competition. You will certainly see some creative strokes and turns. Starts maybe from a mounting block, the side of the pool or in the water dependent on the competitor's ability. Be sure you are prepared to sequence in any swimmer who has an uncommon start.

If you are a new official, middle school swimming is a great place to test the waters. You will see the unusual far more frequently than in high school meets. Your crowd and swimmer control skills will likely be challenged, and your knowledge of the rules tested.

One final point. Be prepared for the meet to start late. Schools often try to schedule middle school competition to start at 4:00 pm. This rarely happens as the visiting team usually has less than an hour between their release time at school and the scheduled start time. Most can not make the trip and get sufficient warmup time in the intervening hour. In those districts that provide bus transport to the meet finding an available bus and driver can be a challenge as most elementary school's release after the middle school and will usually get priority.

Rules Review: Absent any league rule can diving be the first event in a middle school league championship?