

## **Canoe Sprint Competition Rules – 6. Umpiring: A basic guide for Umpires**

An umpire's responsibilities are often misunderstood, but the rules are quite clear:

**The Umpire shall see to it that during a race the rules are complied with. If the rules are broken, the Umpire shall report the infraction to the Chief Official, who, in turn, shall refer it to the Competition Committee. The Competition Committee shall decide whether any of the competitors concerned shall be disqualified or not.<sup>2</sup>**

So, the umpire does not disqualify any competitor, only reports in writing any infraction of the rules.

Before the race, it is for you as umpire to explain to your motorboat driver, where you wish to be during the race and the hand signal instructions you will give. Communications between you should be by hand signal only as any shouting over the noise of the motorboat engine may be disturbing or of concern to a competitor. You should explain to your motorboat driver:

1. the lane in which you wish to follow the race
2. the hand signal you will give to follow in an adjoining lane
3. the distance you wish to follow behind the race
4. the hand signal you will give to stop
5. the position you wish to stop at the end of the race and await acknowledgement of your flag signal to the Chief Official
6. the landing place should you wish to file a report.

Very rarely is an umpire requested by the Starter to assist in stopping boats in the event of a false start. However, if requested to do so, you must be very careful not to cause undue distress to any crew through careless use of the wash from your motorboat.

The umpire should follow the race in a central position so as to have a clear view of all the competitors. Where two umpires are employed they follow the race in positions where all competitors may be seen more easily, i.e. in a 9 boat race will follow in lanes 3 and 7, (3 and 6 for an 8 lane Olympic competition). Both umpires must cover lane 5. During a race the umpire may need to change lanes:

- a) to obtain a clearer view of an infraction, or
- b) if following a very slow competitor.

Often ex-paddlers, new to umpiring, may be seen darting all over the course, looking at one group of competitors and then another. This is bad practice. If alone, the umpire should not change by more than two lanes either side of the central lane or, by more than one lane when two umpires follow. Only in exceptional circumstances should there be a need to change lanes. Remember that you are there to watch the whole race. The

umpire's boat can go alongside the last crew, if they are particularly slow, but should not go ahead of any boat (unless they are many lanes distance) and certainly not allow the motorboat's wash to hamper a crew, no matter how long it takes for them to finish.

There is sometimes a danger in anticipating the flow of action during a race or of concentrating on one or two crews to the exclusion of all other competitors. A common error is for the umpire to be fixed watching one crew's infraction and not see developments that may be occurring elsewhere. It is vital that the umpire views each boat every three to four seconds at the very least, to ensure that every crew is complying with the rules. Often it requires considerable or total concentration.

Your motorboat should stop between 50 and 100 metres before the finish line and must never cross it. A competitor who has truly raced will feel that they are going to die. They do not need the wash from your motorboat to add to their distress.

Where there are two umpires, they are severally required to umpire the whole race and report any infraction they may see, although they will each naturally have best view of those boats in the lanes to the front of them (1 to 5 or 5 to 9). The umpire must not overlook infractions which might be rationalised as "it really didn't affect the result" or which "the other umpire was in a better position to call".<sup>9</sup> All competitors depend on officials for fair outcome of the race and therefore, officials must enforce the rules.

Again, umpires must act and report independently. An umpire should not show a red flag merely in support of the other umpire's "call". Neither should they show one if they are not positive an infraction has been made.

In championship competitions, where there has been an infraction and a red flag is shown, umpires must also display the lane number/s of the offending crew/s to the view of the Competition Committee.

Sometimes there is more than one infraction by more than one competitor or boat. The umpire must prioritise these in the report. The key is the ability and judgement to distinguish between those infractions that place an opponent at a disadvantage and those technical infractions that have no bearing on the competition. This is called the Tower philosophy after Oswald Tower.<sup>9</sup> However, the philosophy does not apply to all the rules. A crew did or did not leave their lane; they were coached or were not coached from the bank, and so forth.

In reporting an infraction to the five metre rule, where two boats come within five metres of each other, the Chief Official and Competition Committee will need to see clearly from the report:

1. where in the race the infraction started, and
2. where the infraction finished,
3. the lane numbers of the crews involved,
4. the distance between boats during the infraction,
5. how close to the lane buoys the crews paddled
6. the leading crew, and

7. the travel of boats on both sides of the offending crew.

The report must be clear, unambiguous and delivered without emotion. Notes should be written during the race as an aid to preparing the report, which must be submitted before the start of the next race. So, an official new to umpiring should practice writing reports and taking notes in all races they follow to build up the expertise required.

No matter how hard you work, or even how competently you perform, complaints will come as they do to all officials. Your reactions to them are part of your development and even when you know your “call” was correct, react to the complaint calmly and firmly. Some rules require judgement; others require interpretation. A good Chief Official will guide you through an incorrect rule judgement or interpretation. He/she will be watching the race and will question you if they feel your “call” was incorrect. They are obliged to ensure fair play and if felt necessary, will reverse your decision, acting in the interests of all competitors.

You must not be dismayed or angered if your “call” has not been acted upon. It is the Chief Official and Competition Committee who carry the responsibility, not you. By all means discuss the incident with other officials with a hope of gaining a better understanding, but it is most important that you accept the decision and move on, continuing to conduct yourself with the utmost integrity.

If questioned by the media, on no account discuss the incident that gave rise to your report or the contents of your report. This is solely a matter between you and the Chief Official. Politely and courteously, you must make it clear that you are not prepared to state what was in your report. However, you can paraphrase or preferably quote the rule itself. Athletes in all sports sell newspapers. Officials do not – they’re not supposed to.

### **Interpretation of Rule 23 – Races up to 1000 metres (including the 5 metre rule)**

The rules make the requirements of competitors very clear. They define the position expected of all boats travelling down the course, all competitors being required to keep the whole of their boat within the four-metre wide central area of their lane from the start to the finish, and no boat coming nearer than five metres in any direction to another boat.

It means that Competitors are not permitted to race down the side of their lane following the line of buoys that mark the lane. The whole boat of the competitor must progress along the course in the four-metre wide central area of the lane and in the case of any deviation out of the central area the boat must return immediately to this central area. This is very fair. It provides for 2.5 metres of water for each boat and the buoys marking the lane, giving at least five metres of clear water between each boat, boats not being allowed to come within five metres of each other – that is, gunwale to gunwale or bow to stern. If a competitor should race within 2.5 metres of their buoy line for 50 metres or more, not returning immediately to the central area of their lane, that is an infraction. The 50 metres can easily be assessed by noting the distance between the lane buoys (normally 12.5 or 25 metres) and the number of buoys passed during the deviation. Rule 18.5 requires the lanes along the length of the course to be marked by buoys not exceeding 25 metres apart. Each boat must pass between all the buoys that mark their lane along the length of the course. For a boat to momentarily deviate out of the line marked by the

buoys but still pass between all the buoys, is not an infraction provided that the boat does not come within five metres of another boat and the boat returns immediately to the four-metre central area of the lane. However, it is reportable and a red flag must be shown at the end of the race with a written report in the normal way.

### **Preparation**

- Revisit the Racing Rules.
- Be well rested and sharp.
- Don't drink alcoholic beverages before or between sessions of duty.
- Report for duty at least 30 minutes before your first event.
- Ensure you know where the Chief Official will be and the quickest way to him/her from the nearest landing position at the finish.
- Note any special instructions from the Chief Official and/or from the Chief Umpire.
- Check you have a programme and list of events you are to umpire.
- Check you have two pens in working order.
- Obtain a small supply of report forms.
- Be sure your sports bag contains sunscreen, a spare woollen top and good rainwear.
- Check that your motorboat is equipped with red and white flags, a set of numbers from 1 to 9, and a paddle.

### **Before the race**

- Be at the start at least 5 minutes before the time of the race.
- Ensure you have given your motorboat driver all details – lane to follow in; hand signals; where to stop at the end of the race; etc.
- Keep your motorboat, and its wash, well away from competitors warming up or lining up for the start.
- Don't talk to competitors; leave them to their own thoughts.

### **During the race**

- Be sharp out there.
- Follow the race in the most central lane, and
- Change your position only if absolutely necessary.
- Watch all the competitors during the whole race.
- Don't talk or shout to competitors.
- Only communicate with your driver by hand signals as agreed.
- Look and listen for outside assistance (coaching).
- Make notes of infractions as they occur, taking note of where they happen on the course.
- Prioritise infractions.
- Take care and act with consideration to any capsized crew – preservation of life has to be your primary concern.
- Stop 100 metres before the Finish Line.

### **After the race**

- Give your report by flag signal, only after all competitors have passed the Finish Line.
- If there are two umpires remember that you are acting severally.
- Watch out for distressed or capsized crews, ensuring that they are receiving assistance if required.
- Prepare your infraction report if needed and aim to have it completed before you reach the landing dock.
- Be fit enough to run up three flights of stairs and deliver your concise and unambiguous report to the Chief Official without appearing breathless. The report must be factual and delivered without emotion. Remember that you are not disqualifying anyone.

### **After the competition**

- Keep a log, writing down any significant fact including rule interpretations that you have learned.
- Discuss any incidents with experienced officials and ask questions.
- Analyse and evaluate your performance with a view to improving.
- Have specific goals for improving. No matter how experienced you may be, there is always room for improvement.

Competitors spend so much of their time in training to achieve their aspirations, at whatever level that may be. It is very important that the official acts in a professional, competent, respectful manner to ensure fair play. The official serves the athlete by ensuring that those competitors to go through to the next round or their position in a final are entitled to be there.

There is no substitute for individual study of the Racing Rules, supplemented by experience and discussion. It takes many years to gain the trust of competitors, coaches and officials. Such officiating integrity is the product of personal honesty and reliability.

**Rowland Jones**  
The British Canoe Union  
I.C.F. Canoe Sprint Official

**ATTACHED:** A Report Form now used by the ICF as from 2007

### **REFERENCES**

2. "International Canoe Sprint Competition Rules" 2011. Publisher: The International Canoe Federation.
9. Richard Clegg and William A. Thompson "Modern Sports Officiating, A Practical Guide" Third Edition (1985). (Chapters 1 and 2). Publisher: Wm. C. Brown.

# course umpire's report

START NO	DATE	TIME	EVENT	NO	HEAT	SEMI-FINAL	FINAL

INDICATE THE RACE DISTANCE 200m 500m 1000m CIRCLE

INDICATE THE DIRECTION OF TRAVEL OF KAYAKS OR CANOES

show travel of boats on both sides of offending lane



0										0
100/250										500
200/500										1000
X OUT NON STARTERS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	

## REPORT

1	out of centre of lane for	50m	75m	100m	150m	more	CIRCLE
2	any advantage	yes	no	did they come with in 5m	yes	no	CIRCLE
3	out of lane aprox distance	metres				TICK	
4	capsize					TICK	
5	left course	retired	did not finish race		TICK		

ANY OTHER FWR RULES INFRINGED STATE CLAUES NO

course umpire

SIGNATURE