Amazing Races – Montreal Canada – August 2014 – Report from Ron Gray – Swimming Referee.

**Thursday** - After 33 hours of travelling I arrived late in the afternoon at my allocated hotel.

**Friday** - A one stop trip on the Metro took me to the venues which were an impressive outdoor main pool complex and a temporary outdoor above ground pool which looked good for swimming but had very limited facilities for the competitors and spectators. The two pools were 15 to 20 minutes walk apart. The walk involved crossing part of the very famous and important St Laurence river.

**Saturday** – the Officials briefing. Our uniforms consisted of a smart white shirt, lightweight tan slacks FINA bag and white baseball cap. Two topics dominated the conversation. The excessive noise from the nearby rock concert and the limited availability of experienced qualified Masters Officials.

We were also advised that all meals for Officials would be served from the canteen. Breakfast was available every morning from 6.45 am with an 8.00 am scheduled start for swimming nearly every day. Lunch and evening meals would be delivered to us on pool deck – this seemed very strange.

**Sunday** – The Competitive Swimming starts. I was Referee for the ladies at both the first session and the evening session at the main pool. I remained at the pool in the shade during the afternoon session. We were short of officials but as it was an 800m freestyle day this was not too critical. Correct timing and lap counting were the priorities. This was a very hot day and the pool temperature started to rise and had to be monitored to stay inside the appropriate temperature range. Swimming finished at 11.00pm.

**Monday** – I was referee for the first of the two scheduled mens’ events in the Main Pool - 200m backstroke and 100m freestyle - Organising the limited number of Officials and getting the timing equipment working were two minor problems. There were, unfortunately, a few problems in the Call Room (Marshalling area) which caused some delays. Swimmers were almost constantly climbing out of the pool over the touch pads. Although not illegal, it does make the event look “untidy” and there is a huge risk of damage to the timing pads and risk of injury to the swimmer. This was an annoying and somewhat concerning trend. I left at the end of my shift with the freestyle running smoothly.

**Tuesday** – working at the temporary pool for first time - I arrived at the main complex at 6.45 am. Unfortunately the ever changing rosters had been adjusted overnight and my morning and afternoon shift had been changed to an afternoon and evening shift. I made a quick decision to return back to my hotel for a rest and to return later. This worked for me but the British Referee who they replaced me with was not aware that he was rostered on to the early shift, so the temporary pool was short of Officials for the first session. I worked from 12 noon until 7.30 pm as Judge of Strokes, Inspector of Turns and Referee. We actually got ahead of the scheduled timings for heats but an “Officials break” at the end of the 200m freestyle put us back on the correct time schedule.

Rain was around with the threat of an electrical storm, so we were advised that we might have to evacuate swimmers from the pool and pool deck if conditions deteriorated which was a concern. The metal structure of the temporary pool was a very high risk factor for lightening strikes.

Then an unusual situation did arise. The temporary spectator stand had become dangerously full with both sets of entry and exit steps blocked and there was a huge risk of injury to spectators. The racing was stopped and the crowd asked to limit their time in the stand and keep seated rather than stand up and cheer. It took a few moments for common sense to prevail and we eventually re-started swimming and finished at 7.40 pm.

**Wednesday** – additional Officials available – but I was still allocated an all day shift commencing at 8.00am. I was Inspector of Turns for the 50m freestyle in the main pool with the men. I changed to Starter half way through the 200m Individual Medley and continued in that role for all of the 100m butterfly events which finished at 7.30 pm. The weather was superb, bright sunlight but not too hot with just the hint of a breeze.

**Thursday** – Relay Day - I was scheduled to work as Inspector of Turns for the two straight sessions. There was a shortage of Officials in the morning which seemed strange as only one pool was in use, but after lunch there was a surplus of Officials and I was invited to leave prior to the end of the racing which was a much appreciated and unexpected bonus. I was very tired. Rain was a problem today and swimming had to be suspended for short periods.

**Friday** – working at the temporary pool with the men – plus a late roster change - I was Referee for the early shift. In the 200m breaststroke there were a number of disqualifications and one swimmer was ruled out for taping his fingers together (cheating). It was also great to sign off on a European Record. I was about to leave at 12.00 noon but a very late roster change had me working the second shift as well. So I worked as Inspector of turns and then Judge of Strokes. This proved interesting and a little concerning as I discovered that some of the officials on pool deck were not very experienced and I did find it hard/unexpected to be doing almost a training session for backstroke turns. There were a number of swimmers who were very fortunate not to be disqualified. Another Referee also expressed his concerns to me about this aspect of the Championships. Although there was still one more day of pool swimming to take place in both pools, this was my last day of pool officiating.

**Saturday** – Open Water Day One - At 6.45 am I had breakfast as normal at the main pool and walked for 20 minutes to the Rowing Centre. This complex like the temporary pool was in the centre of the Canadian Grand Prix Car Racing circuit. I was an on-course Referee in an open motorised boat with a designated driver and after an excellent briefing the first swimmers were off at 10.00 am. – up the course round two buoys and back to the finish/start line. All went well during the various heats and at 3.00 pm after all swimmers were accounted for we left after a quick de-brief. The weather had been really good – just a slight breeze from noon onwards but very sunny.

**Sunday** the last day of the Championships - I arrived at the Rowing Complex at 7.00am after catching the shuttle bus from the Metro Station. Just in time for a cooked breakfast. Today all the Officials were given some very smart dark blue shorts to wear which complimented our white Officials shirt. I was still on a boat but with another Official on board as well as a different boat driver. All went well today with water safety numerically upgraded from yesterday as we were dealing with the older age groups. It was very hot and sunny. For the very last heat of the oldest swimmers all four Referee boats were deployed. After a great deal of whistle blowing to keep competitors on course, we eventually watched the last two swimmers cross the finish line and just a few minutes later, all the Officials gathered together for hugs and handshakes and a team photo.

**Summary** - A very pleasing aspect of the whole eight days of competition was receiving constant thanks from competitors around the two pools and at the Open Water venue, even whilst travelling on the Metro train in the morning and the evening. It was a one stop journey with the train being packed mainly with Masters Swimmers, their supporters, coaches and other officials.

It was also really great to be working with so many different Canadian Officials and making friends with Officials from Britain, Germany, Uruguay, Slovakia and many other countries around the world.

I left the Open Water complex on the shuttle bus feeling very pleased with my efforts and my contribution to the whole World Championship and even on the short journey on the shuttle bus the swimmers were still thanking all the Officials for a job very well done. It was extremely pleasing to have these accolades as a final memory of the event.