
2026
U.S. MASTERS SWIMMING
CODE OF REGULATIONS
AND
RULES OF COMPETITION

U.S. Masters Swimming was founded in 1970 and remains dedicated to the premise that the lives of participants will be enhanced through swimming. This book establishes certain rules and regulations for the conduct of the organization, the participants, and the competitors. The most up-to-date version of this rule book is available online at: www.usms.org/rules.

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On the Cover: Swimmer poses underwater in Sarasota, Florida. Photo by Mike Lewis/@MIKE2SWIM

Rule Book Dedication

Doug Hayden, longtime chair of the Missouri Valley LMSC, died on August 20, 2025, after a multiyear battle with abdominal cancer.

Hayden's 11 years as LMSC chair were marked by his unwavering commitment, passionate leadership, and tireless energy. Hayden mentored and coached hundreds of swimmers—from beginners to nationally ranked competitors—and served as meet director for MOVY's annual fall meet. Hayden proudly represented his LMSC at numerous USMS annual meetings and at Relay, always ensuring MOVY's swimmers were heard and supported. Under his leadership, MOVY not only stayed afloat; it thrived.

In their nomination of Hayden for a USMS Dorothy Donnelly Service Award, LMSC board members wrote that Hayden embodied “the very best of Masters Swimming: leadership, resilience, inclusivity, and heart.” Hayden was one of the 2025 recipients of this award at the USMS annual meeting, held in his hometown of Kansas City, shortly before his death.

Putting Hayden in just one life category is impossible. He was an athlete and volunteer but also a husband and father, singer, traveler, devoted to his faith, record holder, and friend to all that came his way. He was a diver at the University of Nebraska, where he met his wife, Genene. He proposed to her in the middle of a triathlon. Once kids came along, he was a stay-at-home dad for the first few years of their lives.

Once he returned to the workforce, variety continued to be the spice of his life: He created a faith group through St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church, sang in the church choir, and had a small business. And he became a force in U.S. Masters Swimming when he founded, coached, and swam



Doug Hayden

for MOVY Masters Swim Team. It was more than just competition for him; it was the people.

Hayden retired in 2021. Two years later he was diagnosed with abdominal cancer, for which he underwent surgery and several rounds of chemotherapy. By June 2024, he was back competing at the 2024 Spring Nationals in Indianapolis.

Hayden's cancer returned later in 2024 but he never let that stop him from realizing his dreams: He went to all 50 states, lost track of how many Kansas concerts he went to after his 40th show, saw his son graduate from college, walked his daughter down the aisle at her wedding, and celebrated his 60th birthday with more than 300 people.

USMS is honored to dedicate the 2026 USMS Rule Book to this beloved LMSC leader, teammate, and friend.

Previous Rule Book Dedications

1989	June Krauser		Championships
1992	Mary Lee Watson		Organizing Committee
1993	Kathrine Casey and Gail Dummer	2008	Steve Schofield
		2009	Meg Smath
1994	All USMS volunteers	2010	Bill Volckening
1995	E. Kevin Kelly	2011	Tracy Grilli
1996	Dorothy Donnelly	2012	Esther Lyman
1997	Jack Geoghegan	2013	Rob Copeland
1998	USMS All-Americans	2015	June Krauser
1999	F.H. "Ted" Haartz	2016	Rob Butcher
2000	Jim Matysek	2017	Tom Taylor
2001	Gene Donner and the staff of Gateway Printing	2018	Anna Lea Matysek
		2019	Jeffrey Roddin
2002	Nancy Ridout	2020	Ralph Davis
2003	Tom Boak	2021	Ray Novitske
2004	Joanne Tingley	2022	Ted Haartz
2005	Walt Reid	2023	Teri White
2006	Pieter Cath	2024	Patty Miller
2007	Pacific Masters XI FINA World Masters	2025	Nadine Day

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Guiding Principles

Mission Statement

Empower adults to improve their lives through swimming.

Vision Statement

Foster a nationwide adult swimming community through lifelong fitness, competition, and education.

Values

Fitness
Camaraderie
Inclusion
Learning
Excellence
Competition
Fairness

Major Changes for 2026

Technology and Automated Data Collection Devices: These devices can be worn for the sole purpose of collecting data. Automated devices cannot be used to transmit data, sounds, or signals to the swimmer or to aid their speed. (article 102.12.1E)

Qualification of Officials: The exact positions entitled to grant an exception regarding officials' qualifications has been better identified. (articles 103.1.1, 103.1.2)

Selection of Meet Referees for National Championship Meets: The Officials Committee and Championship Committee have updated the process for the selection of meet referees at national championship meets. (article 104.15.10)

False Starts: The jurisdiction of which officials can call a false start has been broadened to allow stroke and turn officials to call the infraction, rather than just the starter. (article 103.8.6D)

Disqualifications: The requirements for where swimmers must start, remain, and finish a race have been updated to comply with World Aquatics regulations. (article 102.13.4)

Backstroke ledges: The permitted distance above and below the water when using backstroke ledges on a backstroke start has been updated to comply with World Aquatics regulations. (article 106.12.1)

Swimwear Requirements: Swimwear requirements for USMS open water swims must be included in the event information. (article 303.4)

Time Adjustment: If a final time is submitted to the nearest second, 0.99 shall be added to the time submitted. If a final time is submitted to the nearest tenth of a second, 0.09 shall be added to the time submitted. The resulting time is considered as the official time. (306.6.3)

Open Water National Championships: A minimum of three open water national championships shall be awarded each year at the discretion of the Long Distance Committee. (article 307.2.2)

Resolving Protests: The process for lodging protests at open water national championships has been clarified. Protests against judgment decisions may not be appealed. Protests must be made to the referee within 30 minutes after the release of results at the venue. If results are not released in a timely manner, a protest may be made to the event director in writing within three days after all swimmers are notified of the release of results. After receipt of a protest, the referee or event director must respond within 10 days. If the protest is denied by the referee or event director, the swimmer may appeal within five days to the Long Distance Committee chair. The Long Distance Committee chair must reply within 10 days, unless the USMS Long Distance chair notifies the parties that the issue must come before the entire committee. Any protest arising from a virtual championship swim must be made to the Long Distance Committee chair in writing within five days after all swimmers are notified of the release of preliminary results or amendments to the preliminary results. The final decision for any protest will be determined by the Long Distance Committee chair. After receipt of a protest, the Long Distance Committee chair must reply within 10

days, unless the chair notifies the parties that the issue must come before the entire committee. (article 307.7.8A–C)

Time Adjustment for Records: If a record attempt has been timed to the nearest second, 0.99 second shall be added to the time submitted. If a record attempt is timed to the nearest tenth of a second, 0.09 shall be added to the time submitted. The resulting time then becomes the official time. (article 308.1.4B–C)

Record Application Documentation: Swimmers applying for a cable swim record must submit a copy of the Application for Long Distance Cable Event Record to the Long Distance Committee chair. (article 308.1.5E)

Standing Committee Meetings at the Annual Meeting: Committees now have the choice whether they want to hold a meeting in conjunction with the annual meeting. (article 507.1)

Glossary

- Administrative official**—an official certified as an administrative official who supervises entries, seeding, determination of official times, results, and meet personnel assisting with these duties.
- Aggregate Time**—times achieved by four individuals in separate starts that are added together to arrive at a relay time for entry purposes.
- Anchored (Starting Platform)**—stable at all times without human aid.
- Arm**—that part of the body that extends from the shoulder to the wrist.
- Bulkhead**—moveable end wall of a course.
- Cable Swim**—a type of straightaway swim defined by a cable.
- Club**—an organization or group of permanent character that is a member of USMS, and that actively promotes and/or participates in Masters Swimming.
- Code**—the *USMS Code of Regulations and Rules of Competition*, including Parts 1–6 and the Organizing Principles.
- College Club Swimming (CCS)**—A swimming program administered by USMS. CCS is the organization that unifies college club swimming programs across the country. CCS provides the rules, calendar of events, results database, and communications for CCS registered individuals and clubs.
- Corporation**—United States Masters Swimming Inc. (USMS).
- Course**—designated distance over which the competition is conducted.
- Long Course**—50 meters.
- Short Course**—25 yards or 25 meters.
- Deck-Entered**—all entries are accepted on the first or later day of that meet and subsequently seeded into events.
- Deck-Seeding**—with or without check-in, events seeded at the time of the event using entries received prior to or at the meet.
- Disability**—a permanent physical, or cognitive disability that substantially impacts one or more major life activities.
- Drafting**—in open water and long distance events, an individual swimming behind or next to a single swimmer or support craft for the purpose of taking advantage of the reduced water resistance.
- Dual Meet**—competition between two clubs.
- Dual-Sanctioned Meet**—A USMS sanctioned meet held in conjunction with a USA Swimming sanctioned meet in which swimmers from both organizations are competing together in the same session(s).
- Electronic Timing Chip**—used to trigger the timing system and may not be used as an audible pacing device in swimming.
- End of the Course**—designated wall for racing turns or finishes.

-
- Escort Craft**—boats or paddle boards that accompany swimmers in an open water swim for safety and logistical support, including the person or people that staff them.
- Event**—any clinic, demonstration, series of races in a given stroke and distance, or meet: including pool, long distance, and open water.
- Event Director**—the person responsible for the administration and conduct of the event.
- Ex Officio Member**—a committee member, appointed by virtue of an office or position held, who has participatory rights of membership but no vote.
- FINA**—*see* World Aquatics
- Finish**—the instant that a swimmer touches the wall at the end of the prescribed distance.
- Finish Point**—the physical location where the race terminates.
- Fitness Events**—events designed to encourage and enhance fitness.
- First Day of Meet**—day on which first competitive swimming event is conducted.
- Foreign Swimmer**—athlete member of a World Aquatics Member Federation other than USMS.
- Forward Start**—an entry made while facing the course or a start made while in the water either facing the course or not facing the course.
- Foul**—an instance of obstruction, interference, collision, or equipment malfunction that prevents the successful completion of a race.
- Gender**—a competition category defined as male or female for the purpose of athlete swimming eligibility for official times, places, records, and other forms of recognition.
- Gender Identity**—an individual’s concept of self, which may be male, female, a blend of both, or neither.
- Grease**—a substance used by swimmers to reduce friction or reduce the loss of body heat during a swim.
- Heat**—a division of an event in which there are too many swimmers to compete at one time.
- Heat Sheet**—a list of events with names of swimmers, heat assignments, lane assignments, ages, affiliations (e.g., club, workout group, and/or LMSC), and seed times.
- Horizontal**—parallel to the level surface of the water.
- Housekeeping**—changes to the *USMS Code of Regulations and Rules of Competition* to correct errors of deviation from adopted language, non-conformity with the *USMS Publications Style Guide*, consistency of wording among multiple articles, or accuracy of numerical article and page references.
- IOPC**—International Olympic and Paralympic Committee.

Initial Distance—that first portion of a race for which an official time may be recorded but which is not itself a completed event.

Lane—the specific area in which the swimmer is assigned to swim.

Lane Line—continuous floating markers attached to a line stretched from one end of the course to the other for the purpose of separating adjacent lanes.

Lane Markers—the guide lines on the bottom of the pool and in the center of the lanes running from one end of the course to the other.

Last Day of the Meet—day on which last competitive swimming event is conducted.

Leadoff—the first part of the relay event that is swum by a single team member.

Leg (Relay)—the part of the relay event that is swum by a single team member.

Length—the extent of the course from end to end.

LMSC—Local Masters Swimming Committee.

Manual Start—the start of any timing device by an individual in response to the same starting signal given to the swimmers.

Marks—(take your) starting positions.

Masters Swimming—a program including training, competition, and other activities affiliated with United States Masters Swimming through the participation of USMS members or through a USMS sanction.

May—permissive, not mandatory.

Medical Identification Item—an item worn by a swimmer that identifies medical conditions, emergency contacts, or other information necessary to protect the health of the swimmer. Medical identification items are not considered part of swimwear.

Meet—an event or series of events held under sanction or recognition and conducted within 10 consecutive days at the same venue or multiple venues for virtual meets. Postal meets may be conducted over periods longer than 10 days.

Meet Announcement—document that sets forth required information about the meet, including the starting times, order of events, entry procedures, and other meet procedures as required by the rules and regulations.

Meet Program—information provided to swimmers, coaches, and officials pertinent to the operation of a meet, which should include entry lists with names, ages, and affiliations (e.g., club, workout group, and/or LMSC), but may also include heat sheets and/or other information.

Member—an individual, club, or organization registered with USMS.

Member in Good Standing—any person or club who has fulfilled the requirements for membership and who has not voluntarily withdrawn nor been expelled or suspended.

Must—mandatory.

Official time—a time achieved in a USMS-sanctioned or -recognized competition in accordance with USMS rules.

On the Back—position of the body when the shoulders are past vertical towards the back.

On the Breast—position of the body when the shoulders are at or past the vertical towards the breast.

Paddler—a person on a paddle board or manually propelled craft who supports a swimmer or group of swimmers.

Pool—the physical facility in which the competition is conducted.

Preliminary Heats—competition in which a number of heats are swum to qualify the fastest swimmers for the finals.

Preseeding—events are seeded prior to the day of competition.

Propulsive—having the power to propel.

Recognized Events—the written acknowledgment by an LMSC for a designated competition conducted in conformance with relevant USMS rules, or a demonstration, clinic, or exhibition conducted by USMS member clubs, individual members, or organizations other than USMS in which both members and nonmembers may participate. Times or distances achieved by members at recognized competitions will be considered for recording purposes by USMS.

Register—enroll as a member of USMS.

Safety Plans—written plans for the procedures to be followed in the event of an emergency or need for medical intervention.

Sanction—the written authorization of an LMSC to permit members to participate in a specific competition, demonstration, clinic, exhibition, or Swim-A-Thon.

Scissors Kick—use of the top of the instep of one foot and the bottom of the other foot in the propulsive part of the kick.

Scratch—withdraw an entry from an event or fail to report to the assigned lane in the assigned heat.

Seeding—distributing swimmers among the required number of heats and/or lanes, based on submitted times.

Session—any portion of a pool meet distinctly separated from other portions of the meet by locale, time, day, or type of competition; i.e., first day and second day, morning and evening, etc., exclusive of a short break between events such as before the start of distance events or relays.

Shall—mandatory.

Should—recommended but not mandatory.

Soft Touch—a swimmer's touch that does not register a time at the point of contact with the touchpad.

Split Time—time recorded from official start to completion of an initial distance within a longer event.

Still Water—water contained within four walls or landlocked, having no perceptible current or movement other than that caused by wind or by swimmers.

Straightaway Swim—any swim of any length where the course shall be a straight, measured distance in stationary open water and defined by a cable with floats or a continuous marking system visible to the swimmer.

Submitted Times—those filed with an entry as having been previously achieved or reasonably estimated; also known as seed times.

Time Trial—a timed heat conducted within a meet where the swimmer races against the clock to establish an official time.

Timed Finals—competition in which only heats are swum and final placings are determined by the times achieved in the heats.

Touch—contact with the end of the course.

Turn—a point on the course where the swimmers reverse or change direction of the swim.

USA-S—USA Swimming Inc.

USAS—United States Aquatic Sports Inc.

USMS—United States Masters Swimming Inc.

Valid Time—a time reported by a designated timing system without a confirmed malfunction and determined by the meet referee or designee to be accurate based on analysis of all reported times, observations by officials, and other relevant data.

Venue—geographical area and environs where a swim event is conducted.

Virtual Event—a swimming competition conducted in multiple pool locations with results compiled in a central location.

Wall—the vertical portion of the pool, the contiguous surface of the deck and overflow gutters, the front portion of the starting block or platform, or the touchpad at the end of the course.

Warning Signal—a bell, whistle, air horn, or other appropriate audible device.

Wave—the second or subsequent start used if the start area cannot accommodate all contestants at the same time.

Will—consent to do, an expectation.

Workout Group—a subordinate organization (subgroup) of a USMS-registered club.

World Aquatics—(Formerly known as FINA).

Zone—a geographic section of the country that includes all LMSCs within that section.