

Official Interpretation Issued by the USMS Rules Committee
Participation by Swimmers with Permanent Medical Limitations in USMS Meets

Article 107 provides guidelines for officiating swimmers with a disability in USMS meets. A disability is defined a permanent life-altering physical or cognitive condition that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Article 107.1.2B(3) says that “aids to buoyancy or speed are not allowed” and further references articles 102.12.1E and 102.13.9. These articles specifically prohibit any device or substance to enhance speed, pace, buoyancy, or endurance during a race, such as webbed gloves, fins, power bands, adhesive substances, snorkels, neoprene caps, etc.

Therefore, swimmers are not permitted to wear such devices in competition under any circumstance, even as a disability accommodation.

However, some swimmers may experience permanent medical conditions that substantially limit one or more major life activities and would be precluded from participation in competition if they are physically unable to swim without the aid of this type of equipment. In the interest of encouraging participation in competition, meet referees may, at their discretion, permit swimmers with permanent physical disabilities or permanent limiting medical conditions to participate in competition with the use of equipment and not include their times in the official results.

Permanent means that the medical condition is not likely to improve with medical treatment to the point where the use of equipment would not be required. This accommodation is **not** intended to apply to swimmers with temporary limiting medical conditions, such as injuries, illnesses, recovery from medical procedures, etc. Referees should evaluate the need for this accommodation in the same manner that they would evaluate a disability accommodation per article 107.

In such cases, the swimmer’s official time and placement **shall** be discretely removed from the results. The result of the swim shall **not** be recorded as a disqualification. Referees must ensure that the swim is not included in the results and shall not be reported, used for any official purpose, or included in a submission of results to the USMS database.

Referees are not required to grant this accommodation and may make the decision based on the potential impact that it would have to the overall operation of the meet.

Charles Cockrell
USMS Rules Committee Chair
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