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Meet Situation #1

At the start of a heat of the Men's 100-meter Freestyle, the Referee gives the "short whistle" signal for swimmers to prepare for their event. Two of the swimmers in the heat step onto the starting platform. The Starter instructs the swimmers to step down and wait for the long whistle. The Referee immediately gives the "long whistle" signal to instruct the swimmers to step onto the starting platform. Was the Starter correct?

The officials were using the correct starting sequence as defined by USMS rules. The "short" whistles are used to signal to swimmers that they should remove clothing, except for swimwear, and prepare to swim. At the Referee's long whistle, the swimmers should step up onto the block, to the edge of the pool deck, or into the water, and wait for the Starter's command. For many reasons, it is not desirable to have swimmers step up onto the starting platform before the Referee has given the signal to do so. The officials are generally correct instructing swimmers to wait for the appropriate signal.

However, there may be other cases where asking the swimmer to step down, only to immediately step back up, would incur an unnecessary delay in the meet and would serve no practical purpose. So, the Referee could just give the signal for the remaining swimmers to step up and start the heat normally. If, in the Referee's judgment, this practice is causing a problem throughout the meet, he could consider an appropriate way to remind swimmers of the correct starting procedure. As officials we should remember that swimmers of all ages, ability levels, and experience levels participate in masters meets and we should take this into account in providing instructions to swimmers. Sometimes "as good as it gets" is good enough.

Meet Situation #2

During a heat of the 1000-yard Freestyle, a Stroke and Turn Official observes that the swimmer in lane four is wearing a wristwatch. The official reports the observation to the Deck Referee, who disqualifies the swimmer for using a device that may aid in pacing. Is the Referee correct?

USMS rules do not permit the use of any device which may aid the swimmer's speed, pace, or buoyancy (102.15.9). However, in this case, the official only reported an observation that the swimmer was wearing a pacing device. USMS and USA-Swimming have interpreted this rule to mean that the swimmer must be using the device, not just simply wearing it.

In order for any disqualification to be valid, the official must provide a clear and definitive observation to the satisfaction of the Referee. In this case, if the official only reported that the swimmer was wearing a watch, the observation does not reflect a violation of the rule and the Referee should not have approved the disqualification.

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In order to show that the swimmer was using a pacing device, the official would have to clearly observe actions that support this conclusion. Some examples could be:

- The official observes the swimmer pressing buttons on a watch to record split times before and/or during a race.
- The official observes the swimmer looking at a watch display multiple times during the race.
- The official hears an audible sound coming from the device at regular intervals during the race.

Remember that if the official is not clear about what they observe, the “benefit of the doubt” concept will apply and the swimmer should not be disqualified.

Meet Situation #3

During a heat of the Women’s 100-yard Freestyle, two swimmers in the heat elect to start in the water. The Starter instructs the swimmer in lane two that she must face the course when starting since the forward start is being used. The swimmer complies and the Starter proceeds to start the heat. Is the Starter correct?

The USA-Swimming glossary defines the forward start as a “forward entry facing the course”. Thus, the Starter concluded that the swimmer should be facing the course prior to the start.

However, USMS Rules do not define the forward start in the manner. Moreover, USMS rules stipulate that either a backstroke start or a forward start may be used in a Freestyle event. In any event except for backstroke, swimmers may start from the block, deck, or in the water.

The requirements for starting in the water are specified in USMS Rule 101.1.1. The swimmer must have at least one hand in contact with the wall or starting block and one foot in contact with the wall. Swimmers who start from the deck or the block must have at least one foot at the front of the block or deck prior to the command “Take Your Mark”. (A difference between USMS and USA-Swimming rules.) The starter should correct swimmers who fail to comply with any of these requirements, but there is no need to instruct swimmers to face the course when starting in the water.

The same is true for breaststroke, butterfly, or individual medley events, but the swimmer must be toward the breast when the feet leave the wall after the start.

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Meet Situation #4

During a heat of the Men's 50-meter backstroke, the Starter instructs the swimmer in lane 3 that he must adjust his foot placement such that the toes are below the line of the gutter. Is the starter correct?

The requirements for backstroke starts are in USMS rule 101.1.2. Both hands must be in contact with the gutter or starting grips. Standing in the gutter, placing the toes over the lip of the gutter, or bending the toes over the lip of the gutter before or after the start is prohibited. Thus, the starter's instructions were correct.

The starter is responsible for enforcing the correct starting position before the start. (In backstroke events, judging the foot position after the start becomes the Stroke and Turn Judge's responsibility.) Starters should also remember that any verbal instructions provided to swimmers should be given in a calm, conversational tone.

Meet Situation #5

During a heat of the Men's 100-yard Backstroke, a Stroke and Turn Official stationed on the side of the pool observes a swimmer in lane two roll past the vertical onto the breast after passing the backstroke flags, take one arm pull, and kick several yards into the wall before executing the turn. The official stationed at the turn end was watching an adjacent lane and did not see the entire turning motion of the swimmer in lane two. However, the side judge raised her hand immediately and reported an infraction to the Referee, citing a non-continuous turning action. The Referee disallowed the infraction on the basis that it was not within the side judge's jurisdiction. Who is right?

(Answer after situation #6)

Meet Situation #6

The Men's 100-yard backstroke is being run with judges at the start and finish ends of the pool. Due to a shortage of officials, there are no judges stationed on the side of the pool and no official stationed at the 15-meter mark. The judge on the turn end observes that the swimmer in lane four was underwater well past the 15-meter mark, surfacing near the backstroke flags. The judge raises his hand and reports the infraction to the Referee. The swimmer's coach challenges the call on the basis that there were no judges on the side and the turn judge did not have a sufficient vantage point to determine that the swimmer went past the 15-meter mark. How should the Referee rule?

Both situations 5 and 6 deal with the question of stroke and turn jurisdictions. The Meet Referee is responsible for defining jurisdictions and these may vary from meet to meet, depending on many factors, including the number of available officials, the experience level of officials, the size of the meet, the format of the meet, and configuration of the pool. The objective is to "balance the deck", providing the best coverage possible, and ensuring that each swimmer is judged fairly and consistently. Many times, we do not have a sufficient number of officials to cover all jurisdictions optimally and must

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combine assignments and jurisdictions accordingly. But, this must always be done in a way that provides fair and equitable officiating for all swimmers.

Regardless of the assigned jurisdictions, the Referee must ensure that disqualifications are backed up by a clear and convincing observation from the official. That includes ensuring that the official was in the appropriate position to be able to clearly see the infraction.

Both situations are judgment calls that the Referee must make. In the first situation, if the turn judge was assigned jurisdiction over backstroke turns, the Referee is probably correct to overrule the side judge. Although the side judge may have seen the infraction clearly, it is not necessarily fair to have the same swimmer judged by two different officials for the same action. Moreover, although the side judge may have been able to see the turn infraction, the officials on the other side of pool may not have been judging this area since the turn judges were assigned this jurisdiction. Thus, allowing the DQ could create an imbalance where some lanes are judged by a different standard than others.

If, however, the Referee had specifically assigned “wall to wall” jurisdiction for the side judges, the call could be upheld if all lanes were being judged the same and the official could clearly see the infraction.

In the second case, it depends on how the Referee has assigned the jurisdictions, how clearly the turn judge can see all of the swimmers in his jurisdiction, and how clear the observation is. Although it is preferable to call this type of infraction from the side (with an official stationed at the 15-meter mark), some meets will operate with officials only at the ends, with the officials having jurisdiction over both stroke and turn infractions. If each lane is being judged in the same way, and the turn judge can clearly observe that the swimmer was underwater the entire distance and was clearly past the 15-meter mark, the Referee can approve the DQ. If, however, this standard cannot be satisfied, the “benefit of the doubt” concept must and the Referee should disallow it. In most pools, it is probably very difficult to discern where the swimmer surfaced relative to the 15-meter mark if viewed from the ends.

In any case, the Referee should clearly establish the positions and jurisdictions as part of the mandatory pre-meet briefing for officials.

Meet Situation #7

During a meet, a swimmer approaches the Meet Referee and explains that he is attempting a USMS record in the 200-meter butterfly. During this event earlier in the meet, the swimmer missed the record by only 0.01-seconds. He requests that the Meet Referee add a time trial at the end of the meet so he can make another attempt. Should the Referee grant the request?

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Rule 102.13.1 states that the “order of events as stated in the meet announcement shall not be changed” and “the announced arrangement of heats shall not be added to or altered except by the authority of the referee to the extent of consolidating heats”. Therefore, adding individual time trials per swimmer requests to the meet program after the sanction has been granted is not permitted. The Referee may not grant the request.

Meet Situation #8

During the Women’s 1000-yard Freestyle, the swimmer in lane 4 mistakenly stops after 950-yards and exits the pool. The timing system operator shouts “you have another 50”! The swimmer re-enters the pool and completes the race. After the race, the swimmer wakes up the Referee on the side of the pool and comments on how wonderful it was that the officials were alert and thanks the officials for allowing her to complete the race, even if her time will be a few seconds off. Does this swimmer have a surprise coming?

U.S. Masters Swimming rules are clear that the swimmer may not leave the pool during the race. As soon as the swimmer exited the water, she was unfortunately disqualified. If the swimmer did not leave the pool, however, she could complete the race even if she stopped early. It should be noted that the swimmer is responsible for completing the specified distance, so the officials are not required to do anything.

Meet Situation #9

At the conclusion of the Women’s 1000-yard freestyle, the swimmer in lane 4 exits the pool. After observing that all of the other competitors have at least 200 yards remaining in the race, she re-enters the pool and warms down. Should the swimmer be disqualified?

There is no rule that explicitly prevents a swimmer in an individual event from re-entering the pool after completion of the race, but the Referee may take appropriate action against the swimmer if her actions were unsafe, unsportsmanlike, or resulted in interference with another swimmer.

Entry into the competition pool is controlled via the start rules. Swimmers may not enter the competition pool unless they are reporting to swim an event or if one or more of the lanes have been designated for continuous warm-up. Rule 102.15.7 states some actions that would not be considered entry into the competition pool (dipping goggles or swim caps into the pool prior to a race).

Rule 102.15.6 prohibits interference with another swimmer. The Referee could conclude that a swimmer re-entering the pool created such a disturbance that he interfered with a swimmer in an adjacent lane who has not yet competed their race.

Thus, the Referee has a little latitude in this situation. If the swimmer exited the pool, but then before stepping away from the edge of the pool, she carefully slipped back into the pool feet first and took a few strokes of cool down, the Referee could do nothing or could warn the swimmer not to exit the pool next time she wants to cool down before the heat is

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concluded. Rule 102.4.2 requires the swimmer to enter warm-up and warm-down areas feet first in a cautious and controlled manner.

If on the other hand, the swimmer deliberately re-entered the pool after some period of time, did so after being asked not to do so or after swimmers were instructed to leave the pool, dove into the pool, created a disruption that had an impact on the other swimmers in the heat, or did so without regard to the other swimmers still swimming, the referee could easily consider the action unsafe or unsportsmanlike and may disqualify the swimmer on these grounds.