

United States Masters Swimming

Long Distance Committee

Rules interpretation for 303.1.1C: Scoring Divisions

The Text of the Rule: “**303.1.1C** If awards are given for competitive swims, they shall be of equal value for men and women.

Discussion: In addition to age group scoring, some open water events also give awards for the top finishers regardless of age group. This has often been phrased in the public event information as “awards shall be given to the top three finishers” or something similar, without mentioning gender.

At issue is the fairness of equal gender opportunity. Although it is possible for women to place better than men at or near the top of the standings in open water swims, top finisher awards that do not separate award categories by gender inherently favor men. One need look no further than the USMS open water and long distance individual records (listed on pp. 129-130 of the 2016 USMS Rulebook), in which the men’s record is faster or further than the women’s record in 89 of the 93 comparisons, to see that this is true.

Rule 303.1.1C clearly prohibits favoritism by gender. Unstated but inherent favoritism by gender—intentional or not—has no place in USMS open water competition, and is implied in this rule.

Ruling: If event hosts offer awards for the top finishers in open water swims, these awards must include separate categories for men and women, with awards of equal value for men and women.

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