

Rules Questions and Clarifications for Officials

November 2010

by Kathy Casey, USMS Rules Chair

1. Minimum number of officials

Question: Am I correct that the minimal officiating crew for official times at a meet is three officials on deck at all times?

Answer: No, the minimum number of officials can be two (103.1); one referee (who must be certified, 103.2), one starter, and two stroke and turn judges, but the referee and starter can both also serve as stroke and turn judges (hence the four positions can be covered by two people). The referee cannot also serve as a starter (103.1.1).

2. Time trials

Question: As a referee, do I have the authority to offer time trials at the end of the meet or spaced throughout the meet if a swimmer asks to swim an event a second or third time to try to break a record or if a swimmer missed an event?

Answer: No, the order of events as stated in the meet announcement cannot be changed, and an event may not be added to a meet that is already in progress. The announced arrangement of heats in any event cannot be added to or altered, except by the authority of the referee only to the extent of consolidating heats (102.13.1). Time trials can be conducted at a meet if they were announced in the meet information and entry form, offered to all swimmers entered in the meet, and counted as part of the event limit per day per swimmer. If the primary timing system is fully automatic, record attempts can also be made during initial distances of longer events and during the leadoff legs of relay events (105.3.6).

3. Choice of strokes during freestyle events

Question: I told a swimmer that she could not do the 200 IM during the 200 free because once a stroke is selected in a freestyle event, you cannot change to another stroke during the race. The swimmer's coach insisted I was wrong. Who was right?

Answer: The coach was correct. In an event designated as freestyle, the swimmer may swim any style (101.5.2). There are no restrictions about changing the style of swimming during a freestyle event. The only restriction regarding style is during the freestyle portion of a medley event; in a medley relay or individual medley event, freestyle means any style other than butterfly, breaststroke or backstroke (101.5.2). Again there is no restriction about changing the style of swimming during the freestyle portion of the medley event. Regardless of the stroke(s) used, times achieved in freestyle events can be recorded only as freestyle times (103.12.2).

4. Medic alert bracelet

Question: I wear a medic alert bracelet and have been told by some referees that it is not allowed to be worn during competition. What is the official ruling on this? I have Crohn's Disease, am immunosuppressed and allergic to latex, and thus my physicians have advised that I not remove the bracelet.

Answer: You can wear the medic alert bracelet. It doesn't provide any potential benefit for speed, and it is essentially a doctor's note providing necessary information about life-threatening medical issues. A doctor's note requesting that the medic alert bracelet be worn during competition is not necessary. In fact, USMS has no rule addressing jewelry for pool competition. Some officials may remember the old "watch rule," a former interpretation of the rule banning any device or substance to help speed, pace, buoyancy, or endurance (102.14.3 in the 2010 rule book, 102.14.6 in the emergency swimwear rule changes) that banned wrist watches from competition. That interpretation has not been in effect since June 2006. Note to officials: forcing a swimmer to remove a medic alert bracelet could cause liability issues for USMS if a medical emergency occurs resulting in injury or death.

5. Written split requests

Question: I swam a 1500 SCM and knew I could get the 800 LMSC record with an initial split. Having never done such a thing before, I read the rules and tried to follow them. I approached the meet referee and tried to submit my split request in writing. He didn't want to take the form, saying that the split time would show up in the meet results anyway. I used the meet results to submit the split time to the LMSC records officer. It apparently was not an "official" time under USMS rules, and would not have counted for Top 10 (which was not a concern!).

Answer: Your written request for the split should have been accepted by the referee and your split time, if it was an automatic time, for the 800 should have been included in your LMSC's submission for USMS Top 10. USMS requirements for official split times are different than those for other swimming organizations and are published in the "Differences" documents for all the swimming governing bodies in Appendix B of the USMS Rule Book. For USA Swimming, the Differences are published in both the USMS Rule Book and the USA Swimming Rule Book. MS2.6.4, page 120, of the USMS Rule Book explains written notice of splits to the referee as well as other USMS split requirements that differ from USA Swimming rules.

6. Backstroke turn

Question: Has the backstroke turn changed? I do an open turn and was told that if I turn to my side as I come in, I must do a flip. I was told that when I turned toward my breast, I should have done a flip turn.

Answer: If you were disqualified because you did not do a flip turn, that is an incorrect interpretation of the rule. If you were disqualified for not initiating the turn or for a non-continuous turning action after turning past vertical toward the breast, those are correct interpretations of the rule (101.4.3). The USMS Rule Book specifically notes in 101.4.3 that a swimmer can turn toward the breast and do an open turn.

7. Breaststroke kick

Question: I'm asking for some clarification on 101.2.3. The last sentence says, "Breaking the surface of the water with the feet is allowed unless followed by a downward butterfly (dolphin) kick." This applies to the dolphin kick permitted after the start and turn, correct? It seems obvious, but I just wanted to check since dolphin kick at any other time is not allowed.

Answer: No, it refers to the breaststroke kick during the entire race. A swimmer's feet can break the surface of the water during the breaststroke kick, and it is not a disqualification, unless it is followed by a downward dolphin kick (or unless there is a scissors, flutter, non-simultaneous movement of the legs, or the movement of the legs is not in the same horizontal plane). The dolphin kick after the start and the turn of course includes the downward portion of the butterfly (dolphin) kick, and that is permitted ONLY after the start and the turn and must be followed by a breaststroke kick. If the swimmer happens to be on the surface when taking that single, butterfly (dolphin) kick and happens to break the surface of the water with the feet, that is also not a disqualification.

For any questions about rules contact Kathy Casey, USMS Rules Chair, rules@usms.org