

USA Swimming Situation Resolutions – Starter/Deck Referee

The following situations have been reviewed by the USA Swimming Officials and Rules Committee

1. In the girls 10 & under 50-yard breaststroke, the starter has just finished giving the command “take your mark” when the swimmer in lane 4 comes down and immediately falls in the water headfirst. The referee could not tell why the swimmer went into the water. However, the starter indicated he/she thought the swimmer had lost her balance when she came down for the start. What should occur and why?

Recommended Resolution: The starter should “Stand up” the remaining swimmers. It should be determined if the swimmer had any outside interference, which they responded to such as a flash camera or horn sound. If the referee agrees that the swimmer fell before becoming set and this was not a starting motion, the swimmer should be allowed to swim with the heat.

Applicable Rules: 102.14.5 A, 102.14.4 C, 102.14.4 D, 102.13.1

2. At a long course Sectional, several National Team and Olympians are seeded into the championship final. Each swimmer will be competing in major international meets representing the USA later that summer. Just prior to the start and after the command is given to “Take your mark” the lane 4 swimmer twitches his right knee. Reacting to the movement, the lane #5 swimmer takes off. No starting signal has been given. What is the ruling?

Recommended Resolution: If it is determined that this swimmer started before the start signal and both the starter and referee confirm this, the offending swimmer in lane #5 should be disqualified. The referee should first, however, determine that there were no extenuating circumstances such as a flash from a camera, etc. If the starter and referee both saw the movement in lane #4 as well and felt that it was a starting action, the swimmer in lane #4 should also be disqualified.

Applicable Rules: 102.14.5 A, 102.14.4C

3. During the 1000-yard freestyle the turn judge, having been given the jurisdiction to sound the warning signal, rings the bell over the leader in Lane #4 at 900 yards. The leader and the swimmer in second place, Lane #5, continue beyond 950 yards and complete the race. The coach of the swimmer in Lane #4 files a written protest stating that his swimmer visibly increased his pace to a sprint at the sound of the warning bell. Realizing that he was not done and having nothing left, he was only able to finish third instead of second, causing his team to lose the meet team championship. What decision should be made with regard to the protest?

Recommended Resolution: The protest should be disallowed. Although a warning signal is required, USA Swimming Rules and Regulations also state that it is the responsibility of the swimmer to complete the prescribed distance.

Applicable Rules: 102.14.6, 102.5.6E

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4. A swimmer makes finals in the 100 backstroke at a preliminary/finals A/B meet where the penalty for failure to show in a preliminary seeded heat is being barred from individual and relay events for that day. At the start of his next event, the 100 butterfly, the coach asks the referee if his swimmer may be disqualified for delay of meet since he wants to save his energy for finals in the 100 backstroke. What should the referee do?

Recommended Resolution: The Starter may disqualify a swimmer who deliberately disobeys a starter's command to step on the block with the concurrence of the Referee. The Referee may now permit a "Declared False Start" in order to keep the meet going and not unnecessarily disrupt the start of a heat.

Applicable Rules: 102.14.7A, 102.14.5D

5. A backstroke heat is started with one swimmer having curled his toes over the gutter prior to the start. The starter and deck referee did not notice although the meet referee and the turn judge did. The swimmer had stopped moving and was in a set position at the start, yet clearly gained an advantage. How should this be handled?

Recommended Resolution: As there was no movement at the start, no false start occurred. Since the toes were already above the water and the toes curled over the gutter at the time of the start, no stroke violation occurred. Since no call/warning was made prior to the start, no call may be made afterwards. This situation is an example where the expeditious recall of the heat could have corrected the advantage gained by the swimmer in question over the rest of the field.

Applicable Rules: 101.3.1, 101.3.2, 102.14.5, 102.14.4C

6. A swimmer in the backstroke stands on the edge of the pool with his back to the pool and his heels in the water. The starter starts the race and the swimmer dives backward from the edge of the pool and wins the race. Is this legal?

Recommended Resolution: The starter should not have started the race as the *USA Swimming Rules & Regulations* state that "the swimmer's feet, including the toes, shall be placed under the surface of the water" at the start. However, the swimmer cannot be disqualified for having an improper starting position. It is the starter's responsibility to ensure that all swimmers have taken a proper starting position.

Applicable Rules: 101.3.1, 102.14.4C

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7. The backstroker in the lane closest to the starter moved his feet up over the gutter just before the starter said, "Take your mark". The starter did not see the toes in an illegal position and did not hear the referee trying to tell him to issue the "Stand Up" command. When the heat was started, the swimmer had stopped moving and was in a set position. No warning had been given to this heat about toes. The meet referee also observed the situation. The deck referee did not blow his whistle to recall the heat and turned to the meet referee asking what should be done. The meet was operating under the whistle start and no recall protocols. What should have been done in this situation?

Recommended Resolution: The position of the feet for the backstroke start is the responsibility of the starter. The heat should not be started if any swimmer is not in the correct starting position. Since the race was started and allowed to continue, there is no disqualification. Also, the stroke rule for the backstroke would not apply as the feet were in an improper position prior to the start and were not moved there after the start.

Applicable Rules: 101.3.1, 101.3.2, 102.14.4C

8. The multi-whistle command is given and then the one long whistle for the 200M fly. The referee turns over the pool to the starter by raising her/his arm in the designated manner. John, age 12, in Lane 3 is not up on the block and before the starter gives the "take your mark" command, jumps up on the block. Is John disqualified for delay of meet rule? If the starter believes that it has not distracted the field, does he/she still ask the swimmers to step down or does the starter start the race?

Recommended Resolution: This is a situation that occurs at many meets and the decision can vary depending on the type of meet, the crowd conditions around the blocks, etc. The decision to allow the heat to go or to step the swimmers down is the referee's. The starter should probably step the heat down and the referee should investigate the situation. This occurrence should be discussed prior to the start of the session so that the starter knows how the referee wishes to have it handled.

In the situation described, if the meet is running a very tight timeline with a lot of activity and crowds behind the blocks, the referee could permit John to swim as he may have just gotten caught in the crowd. If this is the championship final of a prelims and finals meet and the referee was patient in waiting to raise his/her arm to indicate that the heat was closed, then a delay of meet DQ would be in order. As stated earlier, a lot depends on the circumstances surrounding the meet and all details need to be taken into account in making a fair decision.

Applicable Rules: 102.13.1, 102.13.4, 102.14.7B

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9. In a heat of the 50-yard freestyle, the swimmers in all lanes take a set position following the "take your mark" command. At the start, the swimmer in lane 4 leaves her mark early. The starter recalls the heat and upon returning to the start end, the swimmers are signaled to step up by the deck referee sounding a long whistle. The coach of the swimmer in lane 5 immediately protests verbally, claiming that the false start was clear to everyone and that the starter recalled the heat intentionally. Should the swimmer in lane 4 be allowed to swim?

Recommended Resolution: While a race can be recalled for an "unfair" start, by rule it is not recalled for a false start. Therefore, even though the starter recalled the race in reaction to the false start, it is still inadvertent in that the recall should not have taken place. As the rule states that "if the recall signal is activated inadvertently, no swimmer shall be charged with a false start..." The swimmer is not charged with a false start and is allowed to swim.

Applicable Rules: 102.14.5(C)

10. Robert is seeded in lane 2, heat 7 of event 24. The lane timer tells him to step up when the referee's whistle blows for heat 6. The deck referee and starter do not realize the incorrect swimmer is on the block and they start the race. Should Robert be disqualified?

Recommended Resolution: The swimmer should not be disqualified. It is the Head Lane Timer who shall determine whether the swimmer or relay team is present and in the correct lane, heat, and event, and the relay swimmers are swimming in the order listed. However, it is important that the time achieved be credited to the correct swimmer.

Applicable Rules: 102.16.3. B (1)

11. On the second day of a three-day prelim/finals meet, the start time of the morning session is moved from 8:30 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. Unaware of the change, a 13-year-old swimmer coming from out-of-town misses the 100 breaststroke. The referee allows the swimmer to fill an empty lane in the 15 & over event. The time the 13-year-old achieves while swimming in the wrong age group would place her in the championship heat of the 13-14 age group. The swimmer is placed in the championship final, displacing swimmers who thought they were in finals or consolation finals. The late swimmer ends up placing in the top three. Was the situation rectified properly?

Recommended Resolution: As the missed swim was not the swimmer's fault the decision to let the swimmer into a subsequent heat was proper. The real lesson is to make sure that you do not change the schedule unless all affected clubs and swimmers can be notified in advance.

Applicable Rules: 102.8.2, 102.8.3

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12. The starter and deck referee are both counting the number of lengths swum in the 1650 freestyle and they believe that the swimmer in lane 2 has swum two fewer lengths than her counter is showing. What should be done?

Recommended Resolution: The deck referee should take action to be sure of the lap count for each swimmer. This can include checking with the console operator to see what the timing console shows, checking with timers, other officials and even coaches, if necessary. This is a good reason for the deck referee and the starter to avoid “shooting the breeze” during the 1650 or any other event for that matter. If the referee and starter are sure they are correct, the referee could check with the swimmer’s coach (presuming enough time is left in the race) and advise him that the counter for his swimmer may have the incorrect count. The referee could also advise the coach that the swimmer is responsible to swim the correct distance even if the counter or an official makes an error.

Applicable Rules: 102.5.6

13. At a local championship meet, Coach Smith noticed that many swimmers during the breaststroke were dropping their shoulders after the final arm pull and prior to the touch. Coach Smith taught his swimmers to keep their shoulders level with the water until the touch was made. He went to the Deck Referee to protest the lack of action from the stroke and turn officials. What should the Deck Referee tell Coach Smith?

Recommended Resolution: The Referee could explain to the coach that the officials understand the rules of the breaststroke and that the rules don’t address the position of the shoulders during the swim or the finish and then refer him to the appropriate section of the rulebook.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2, 101.1.4, 101.1.5