

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

14. As the deck referee, you hear a second beep from the electronic starting system. You observe half the field stop swimming and look around before continuing their race. What should be done?

Recommended Resolution: The referee should instruct the starter to recall the heat either by blowing his whistle or by verbal command. This is one of the situations where having the microphone in a ready position and the microphone key depressed is beneficial as it would allow the starter to readily signal a recall.

Applicable Rules: 102.13.1, 102.13.4

15. As the deck referee, you observe the starter has not waited until all swimmers have become stationary before sending the heat. What should the deck referee do?
Recommended Resolution: The appropriate course of action will depend on the level of the meet. For young, novice swimmers, what you see may be as good as its going to get. For a meet with older, more experienced swimmers, the deck referee could ask the starter to recall the heat and explain to the starter why he or she was asked to do so. The deck referee could also speak to the starter about making sure to wait until all swimmers are stationary. If the problems continue and another starter is available, the starter could be replaced.
Applicable Rules: 102.13.1, 102.13.4, 102.14.4C

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16. In the bonus final, the deck referee blows the long whistle and all swimmers step onto their blocks. After the deck referee turns the heat over to the starter, the starter instructs the field to “take your mark.” The starter’s voice waivers and is somewhat low but all swimmers appear to have taken their marks. At the start, lane 7 stands up on the blocks and lane 8 starts late. What should be done?

Recommended Resolution: This could be viewed as an unfair start and the heat could be recalled. If the referee or starter heard or saw something that could have caused the problem, then a recall would be in order. If the heat does not get recalled, the deck referee should investigate what happened and determine if any other swimmers in that heat were affected. Those affected by the situation can be offered a re-swim. The times from those with the re-swim would count instead of their first swim. Both heats would be combined to determine the finish order for the bonus final.

Applicable Rules: 102.10.9

17. After the start of the last heat of the women’s 400-meter freestyle, the starter sounds the recall. However, none of the swimmers respond and since there is no recall rope, they all continue swimming. Half of the swimmers are stopped at the 50-meter turn while the other half get to the 100-meter turn before stopping. What should the deck referee do?

Recommended Resolution: The heat needs to be re-swum but the swimmers will need some time to recover. The swimmers and/or their coaches should be asked how much time they will need to recover and be ready to swim. As the men’s 400-meter freestyle is the next event, the referee should start that event and then re-swim the women’s heat after one or more of the men’s heats have been swum. Also, if a time line has been published, verify that all swimmers seeded into the first heat of the men’s 400-meter freestyle are present before starting the event.

Applicable Rules: 102.14.5C, 102.13.1, 102.13.4

18. A swimmer in a 200-yard freestyle relay swims 15 yards, loses his goggles and then swims back to the start end. The relay continues without anyone noticing the infraction except the turn judge at the turn end who does not raise his hand as the swimmer was not in his jurisdiction. A couple heats later, the embarrassed coach approaches the referee, explains what happened and asks the referee to disqualify the relay. What should the referee do?

Recommended Resolution: The referee cannot disqualify the team because no hand was raised at the time of the infraction. However, the referee or chief judge needs to have a discussion with the turn judges regarding freestyle jurisdiction, making the call when the swimmer does not touch the wall and being generally more observant. The turn judge at the turn end should have raised his hand when the swimmer turned and started swimming back to the start end.

Applicable Rules: 102.10.15F

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19. During the course of a session a starter has, in several heats, issued the stand command and “saved” the swimmer or swimmers from a false start. In a subsequent heat, the starting signal was given and the swimmer in lane 2 started early and was disqualified for a false start at the end of the race. The swimmer’s coach came to the referee and asked why the starter hadn’t “saved” his swimmer. What should the referee do?

Recommended Resolution: The swimmer was disqualified after the starting signal by the referee and starter for starting prior to the starting signal when they independently declared the false start after the starting signal was given which is the correct protocol. The stand command is a judgment call by the starter. When all the swimmers are stationary the starter shall give the starting signal.

Applicable Rules: 102.14.4C, 102.14.4D, 102.14.5B

20. In a heat of the mens 400-meter individual medley, all eight swimmers step up on the blocks in response to the referee’s long whistle. The referee turns the field over to the starter and subsequently the starter asks the swimmers to “take your mark.” At that point, the referee notices that the swimmer in lane 7 has stepped off the block to remove his drag suit. The referee attempts to take back control of the heat but the starter starts the race as the swimmer in lane 7 is starting to get back on the block. What should be done?

Recommended Resolution: If both the starter and the referee agree, the swimmer could be charged with delay of the meet and disqualified. Alternatively, the starter could have immediately recalled the heat. After the heat is run, the swimmer who caused the incident should be spoken to about his actions to try to prevent a similar occurrence in the future.

Applicable Rules: 102.14.7A,

21. In a 200-meter backstroke event, the referee blows the first long whistle. The swimmer in lane 3 leaps as far as he can into the pool and slowly sinks to the bottom of the pool. He slowly rises to the surface moving farther away from the start end after which the referee blows the second long whistle. While the other seven swimmers assume a position at the wall, the lane 3 swimmer very slowly swims to the wall and very slowly assumes a starting position. The starter asks that the swimmer in lane 3 be disqualified for delay of the meet. The referee concurs and the swimmer is disqualified. Is this a correct call?

Recommended Resolution: This is a call that requires good judgment from the referee. Did the swimmer delay so much that he was creating a problem for the other swimmers? Swimmers have different ways to prepare to race and you don’t want to interfere with that unless it negatively affects other competitors. An alternative to a DQ might be to discuss the situation after the race with the swimmer and/or the coach. This is especially useful for the first occurrence of this type of activity. Is the call correct? It might be but this is a situation that can only be decided on site.

Applicable Rules: 102.14.7A, 102.14.4A

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22. At an LSC championship meet with over-the-top starts and a very tight timeline, the swimmer in lane 4 of the next to last heat of the 200-meter butterfly is called for an alternating kick prior to the head breaking the surface of the water. At the end of the heat, the swimmer is advised of the DQ but she says that a swimmer from the previous heat was making faces at her and caused her to start giggling and then swallowed water after the start. Should the coach's request for a re-swim due to interference be granted?

Recommended Resolution: Unless the actions of the swimmer in the water were very flagrant and deliberate, the actions of the swimmer in the water at the start should probably not be considered unsportsmanlike conduct. However, the referee might seek out the swimmer or her coach and explain that there are safety and fairness concerns with swimmers affecting the starts of other swimmers.

Applicable Rules: 102.10.3, 102.10.9

23. In a 200-yard freestyle event, a swimmer asks the referee if he can swim the backstroke. The referee replies that he can but that the time can only be used as a freestyle time. At the referee's long whistle the swimmer enters the water to do a backstroke start. The referee signals to the starter that the field is his and the starter starts the race. Was this correct?

Recommended Resolution: No. In the freestyle events the forward start must be used. However, as the starter and referee allowed the swimmer to start in the water, the swimmer cannot be disqualified for starting in the water.

Applicable Rules: 101.4.1

24. In the final preliminary heat of the 400-meter individual medley, the swimmers assume a stationary position at the start. The starter starts the race. The swimmer in lane 2 slips on the block pushing off and "flops" into the pool a body length behind the field. Should the starter have recalled the race?

Recommended Resolution: This is a judgment call that needs to be made on site. There could have been a problem with the block or with something next to it that contributed to the situation. As the benefit of the doubt goes to the swimmer, the starter should recall the heat and then the referee should check on what happened in order to preclude further problems. All swimmers will be allowed to swim the heat.

Applicable Rules: 102.14.5C