

Situations and Resolutions—Starter and Deck Referee

The following situations and resolutions have been outlined by the USA Swimming Officials Committee and the USA Swimming Rules and Regulations Committee to demonstrate examples of various situations that Starters and Deck Referees may encounter during the starting sequence to be used for officials' education and training. While this resource has been designed to be representative of the many situations that a Starter or Deck Referee may come across, it is not intended to be exhaustive. The core principle of officiating—that the benefit of the doubt always goes to the swimmer—as well as the use of common sense and good judgment—should always be followed.

- 1. During the finals of an LSC championship meet, the Meet Referee instructs the Deck Referees to allow the announcer to read the names of the athletes in the championship final, allow for a pause, then blow their short whistles, followed by a long whistle. Is this the correct procedure?**

Recommended Resolution: Yes, this is. The rules state that, "Once all swimmers have removed their clothing, except for swimwear, the Referee shall signal the commencement of an event by a short series of whistles inviting them to get ready at the starting end." This means that for championship finals, the short whistles should be blown immediately prior to the long whistle, rather than prior or during the parade or announcements of finalists, when athletes have not removed their clothing except for swimwear. Deck Referees should remain flexible and adapt to the needs of each meet and preferences of each Meet Referee.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2

- 2. After entering a swimmer in an LSC invitational meet, a coach contacts the Meet Referee and informs the Meet Referee that one of their swimmer's has Tourette's syndrome. The coach asks that the swimmer not be disqualified for a false start. How should this be handled?**

Recommended Resolution: The rules state, "When all swimmers are stationary, the starter shall give the starting signal" and "Any swimmer initiating a start before the starting signal is given shall be disqualified if the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter's observation." There is no accommodation or modification for initiating a start before the starting signal in Article 105.5. It should be noted that uncontrolled movements are not typically "initiating a start" before the signal is given. The Starter(s) and Deck Referee(s) should be given the event, heat and lane where the athlete will be competing should the athlete require additional time to assume their starting position. The coach or an assigned Personal Assistant may be at the block to assure a fair start for the swimmer.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2, 101.1.3, 105.5

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- 3. In the 200 yard breaststroke, the Referee asks the Starter to recall the heat, on the basis of an unfair start. The Starter is inexperienced and unfamiliar with the starting system, and is unable to recall the heat. How should the situation be handled?**

Recommended Resolution: The Referee may also attempt to use their whistle and/or a recall rope if present, to recall the heat. Should the swimmers not stop their racing, the Referee may offer all of the swimmers in the heat the opportunity to re-swim the race. For the swimmers that choose to re-swim, only the times of their re-swims will count.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.1, 102.11.1, 102.11.5, 102.12.1, 103.19

- 4. At an age group meet, the electronic starting system malfunctions and cannot be immediately fixed. How should the meet proceed?**

Recommended Resolution: The rule states, “A loudspeaker start system conforming to 103.18, with or without an underwater recall device, and an electronic strobe signal visible to all manual timers for forward and backstroke starts, shall be the preferred starting device.” While this is the preferred starting device, it is not the only acceptable starting device. The Referee may consider allowing the Starter to use a whistle to sound the starting signal, ideally in conjunction with the use of another loudspeaker device to give the verbal commands. The coaches should be consulted before these changes are implemented.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.1, 102.11.1, 102.11.5, 103.18

- 5. In the 200 yard backstroke, the swimmers enter the water upon the Referee’s first long whistle, returning to the wall on the second long whistle. When the swimmer in lane 7 returns to the wall, the swimmer places their feet on the wall as required by the rules, and places their hands on the starting grips on top of the block, which are intended to be used for the forward start. How should the situation be handled?**

Recommended Resolution: The rule states, “Handgrips for the forward start may be installed on the sides of the starting platforms.” As the rule clearly states that these handgrips are for the forward start, they may not be used for the backstroke start. The Starter should ask that the swimmer assume a legal starting position and should not allow the race to proceed until the swimmer assumes a legal starting position. In the event that the swimmer refuses to comply, the Starter may



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recommend to the Referee that the swimmer be disqualified for willful disobedience of the command.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2A, 101.1.2E, 101.1.5A, 101.4.1, 103.14.3 103.14.4

6. **At the start of the 50 yard freestyle, the Referee blows the long whistle, indicating for the swimmers to step up onto the blocks. A swimmer is standing behind the block in lane 7, but does not step up. How should the situation be handled?**

Recommended Resolution: First, the Referee should ask the Starter to give a command for lane 7 to “step up.” If the swimmer responds to the command by stepping up onto the block, the heat should proceed normally. If the swimmer does not respond to the command by stepping up onto the block, the Referee should investigate the situation—it is possible that the swimmer may not understand the command. If no extenuating circumstances are found and the swimmer is simply refusing to comply, a disqualification for delay of meet, or a penalty for failure to compete (no-show), may be in order.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2A, 101.1.5A, 101.1.5B

7. **During the 200 yard breaststroke, the swimmer in lane 8 does not immediately step up onto the block upon the Referee’s long whistle. The referee gives an outstretched arm to the Starter, at which point, the swimmer in lane 8 steps up onto the block. How should the situation be handled?**

Recommended Resolution: This is a situation where the circumstances of the individual swimmer and meet, as well as “level-appropriate decision-making” must be applied. If the Referee considers the delay to not be excessive and/or a disruption to the other swimmers, they may allow the heat to proceed normally. In the event that the Referee considers the delay to be excessive, they should ask the Starter to step down the heat, and then investigate the situation. If the Referee finds that the delay was outside of the control of the swimmer and that other circumstances were involved, they should allow the swimmer to swim. If the Referee finds the delay to be in the control of the swimmer, a disqualification for delay of meet may be in order. The Referee must remember that the swimmer should always receive the benefit of the doubt. The fact that the Referee had given an outstretched arm to the Starter has no bearing on the situation; the Referee may always rescind the arm and take back control of the heat if necessary.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2A, 101.1.5A, 101.1.5B



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8. In the 100 yard freestyle, the Referee blows the long whistle, and the swimmer in lane 3 steps up onto the block with one foot towards the back of the block and the other foot a few inches away from the front of the block. Is this an acceptable starting position?

Recommended Resolution: Yes, this is an acceptable starting position. The rule states, “On the Starter’s command ‘take your marks,’ the swimmers shall immediately assume their starting position, in the forward start, with at least one foot at the front of the starting platform or the deck.” Anywhere on the front half of the starting platform is considered to be the front of the starting platform.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2C, 101.1.2D

9. In the 50 yard breaststroke, the Starter has just finished giving the command, “take your marks,” when the swimmer in lane 4 comes down and immediately falls into the water, head-first. The Referee could not determine why the swimmer went into the water. However, the Starter indicated they thought the swimmer had lost balance while assuming the starting position, and never assumed a stationary position. How should the situation be handled?

Recommended Resolution: The Starter should stand the heat. As the Starter determined that the swimmer had never assumed a stationary position, the swimmer falling into the water is not considered to be a starting motion. Therefore, the Starter should not record the observation of a false start, and the swimmer should return to the block and be allowed to swim with the heat.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2C, 101.1.2D, 101.1.3A

10. During an age group session, the Starter is relatively inexperienced. The Starter uses the “Stand, please,” command nearly every heat, commenting to the Referee, “They’re just not coming down together.” How should the Referee respond?

Recommended Resolution: The Referee should suggest that the Starter be more patient before giving the “take your marks,” command, providing the swimmers with a few more moments to settle on the blocks. If the swimmers have a few more moments to settle once stepping up onto the blocks, they will likely respond better to the “take your marks,” command. Additionally, the Referee should suggest that the Starter exercise a bit more patience after giving the “take your marks,” command, prior to resorting to standing the heat, as the swimmers might just need another moment or two to become stationary.

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Applicable Rules: 101.1.2C, 101.1.2D, 102.12.1

- 11. In the 50 yard freestyle, the Starter gives the “take your marks,” command. The swimmer in lane 1 establishes a stationary position, jolts forward, and then re-establishes a stationary position, prior to the starting signal. Should the swimmer be disqualified for a false start?**

Recommended Resolution: No, the swimmer should not be disqualified for a false start. The swimmer was stationary when the starting signal was given, and, therefore, the swimmer did not start before the starting signal, and should not be charged with a false start.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2C, 101.1.3A, 101.1.3B

- 12. At a long course sectional meet, several members of the National Team are seeded into the championship final of the 100 meter breaststroke. The swimmers will be competing in major international meets, where they will be representing the USA later that summer. Just prior to the starting signal, and after the “take your marks,” command is given, the swimmer in lane 4 twitches their right knee, but does not leave their stationary starting position. Reacting to this movement, the swimmer in lane 5 dives into the pool. No starting signal has been given. How should the situation be handled?**

Recommended Resolution: If possible, the Starter should stand the heat. If it is observed by the Starter and independently observed and confirmed by the Referee that the swimmer in lane 5 started before the starting signal, the swimmer lane 5 should be disqualified for a false start. If the Starter is able to stand the heat, this swimmer should be removed from the heat; if not, the race shall continue without recall. As the swimmer in lane 4 did not leave their stationary starting position, the knee twitch is not considered to be a starting motion, and the swimmer should not be disqualified. The fact that the false start in lane 5 may have been in reaction to the movement of the swimmer in lane 4 has no bearing on the disqualification.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2C, 101.1.3A, 101.1.3B

- 13. At a long course sectional meet, several members of the National Team are seeded into the championship final of the 100 meter butterfly. The swimmers will be competing in major international meets, where they will be representing the USA later that summer. Just prior to the starting signal, and after the “take your marks,” command is given, the swimmer in lane 6 twitches their right knee, leaving their stationary starting position and diving**

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into the pool. Reacting to this movement, the swimmer in lane 7 leaves their stationary starting position and dives into the pool. No starting signal has been given. How should the situation be handled?

Recommended Resolution: If possible, the Starter should stand the heat. If it is observed by the Starter and independently observed and confirmed by the Referee that both swimmers started before the starting signal, both swimmers should be disqualified for false starts. If the Starter is able to stand the heat, the swimmers should be removed from the heat; if not, the race shall continue without recall. The fact that the false start in lane 7 may have been in reaction to the false start in lane 6 has no bearing on the disqualification.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2C, 101.1.3A, 101.1.3B

- 14. The Starter for the 100 yard butterfly events is relatively inexperienced, and is “holding” the swimmers after the “take your marks,” command for an extended period of time. The swimmer in heat 2, lane 4 starts before the starting signal. How should the Referee handle the situation? How should the Referee handle the situation if these same events occur over the course of several heats?**

Recommended Resolution: The Referee must keep in mind that the other swimmers in the heat did not start before the starting signal. That being said, if the Referee determines that the start was “held” so long that it was unfair, they may ask the Starter to recall the heat; in this case, the swimmer in lane 4 would not be charged with a false start. In the event that this occurs over the course of several heats, the Referee should speak to the Starter in a constructive way, suggesting that he give the starting signal as soon as all of the swimmers are stationary, working with the Starter to learn and improve. If this is a higher-level meet and/or if the starts do not improve after this mentoring, it would be appropriate for the Referee to replace the Starter, if another Starter is available.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2C, 101.1.3A, 101.1.3B, 102.11.1, 102.11.5, 102.12.1

- 15. At a local meet, the Starter does not use a conversational tone when giving the “take your marks,” command. Instead, the command is yelled in a harsh-sounding voice. How should the Referee handle the situation?**

Recommended Resolution: The Referee should remind the Starter that the “take your marks,” command should be delivered conversationally in a calm, inviting voice. The Referee should work with the Starter in a supportive and mentoring way, helping to improve the starting voice.

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Applicable Rules: 101.1.2C, 102.11.1, 102.11.5, 102.12.1

- 16. During the session at a local senior meet, the Starter uses an odd cadence when giving the “take your marks,” command, delivering the words in a short, choppy, fashion, with extended pauses between each word, “Take....your....marks.” It is clear to the Referee that the swimmers are not responding well to his commands. How should the Referee handle the situation?**

Recommended Resolution: The Referee should remind the Starter that the “take your marks,” command should be delivered conversationally, in a smooth manner, with a slight dropping in tone. The Referee should work with the Starter in a constructive and mentoring way to help improve this cadence.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2C, 102.11.1, 102.11.5, 102.12.1

- 17. A coach complains to the Referee that the Starter is “holding the swimmers too long” and asks that the Starter be replaced. The Referee has been closely monitoring the starts, and considers them to be patient and fair. How should the situation be handled?**

Recommended Resolution: The Referee should explain to the coach that the Starter is being patient for the swimmers to assume a stationary position and that the swimmers have been receiving fair starts. The Referee cannot reassign the Starter simply because a coach not is pleased with the starter’s performance.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2C, 102.11.1, 102.11.5, 102.12.1

- 18. The Referee observes, over the course of several heats, that the Starter is not waiting for all swimmers to become stationary before giving the starting signal. What should the Referee do?**

Recommended Resolution: The Referee should, in a respectful, educational, and encouraging way, remind the Starter of the importance of patience during the starting sequence. More specific feedback can and should be given based on the actual situation. If the Referee determines a start to be unfair, requesting the Starter to recall the heat is an option. If it is a high-level meet and/or if the issues continue, the Starter could be replaced, if another Starter is available.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2C, 102.11.1, 102.11.5, 102.12.1

- 19. During an age group session, the Starter is relatively inexperienced. The**

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Referee notices that during every heat, after giving the “take your marks,” command, the Starter waits for almost exactly two seconds prior to giving the starting signal, regardless of whether or not the swimmers are stationary—or if they were already stationary, “waiting” for the signal. How should the situation be handled?

Recommended Resolution: The rule states, “When all swimmers are stationary, the Starter shall give the starting signal.” The Referee should remind the Starter to observe the swimmers and watch for them to become stationary before giving the starting signal, not be focused on using a fixed timing pattern. The Referee should mentor the Starter, working to improve observation and patience.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2C, 102.12.1

- 20. During the preliminaries of a senior meet, the Referee observes that, after giving the “take your marks,” command, the Starter waits for every swimmer to become stationary at the front of the block prior to giving the starting signal. The Referee also observes that many swimmers are still moving backwards and are not yet completely stationary when the starting signal is being given. How should the situation be handled?**

Recommended Resolution: The rule states, “When all swimmers are stationary, the Starter shall give the starting signal.” The Referee should remind the Starter that they should be observing the entire bodies of the swimmers when determining if they are stationary. Just because a swimmer may be stationary at the front of the block, they may not be entirely stationary and ready to start. The Referee should mentor the Starter, working to help improve observation and patience.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2C, 102.12.1

- 21. At a novice meet, many young swimmers are competing for the first time. When the Starter gives the “take your marks,” command, many of the swimmers are wobbly. The Starter is concerned that the swimmers are not becoming “stationary.” How should the situation be handled?**

Recommended Resolution: The rule states, “When all swimmers are stationary, the Starter shall give the starting signal.” Stationary does not mean motionless. Young swimmers may be wobbly at the start. Whether or not they are stationary, is a judgment call made by the Starter. The Starter should exercise great patience when starting novice swimmers. Once the Starter judges that the swimmers have become as stationary as they are going to become, given the level of meet, the starting signal should be sounded.



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Applicable Rules: 101.1.2C, 102.12.1

- 22. During the 100 yard backstroke, the Starter gives the “take your marks,” command. The swimmer in lane 4 does not promptly respond to the command, so the Starter gives the “relax, please,” command. Is this correct procedure?**

Recommended Resolution: No, this is not correct procedure. The “Relax, please,” command should only be used at the discretion of the Referee, to notify swimmers that there will be a prolonged period before the starting sequence will begin. It is not an acceptable substitute for the “Stand, please,” command.

Applicable Rule: 101.1.2D

- 23. In the 200 yard freestyle, the Starter gives the “take your marks,” command, and the swimmers become stationary. The swimmer in lane 7 leaves their stationary position prior to the starting signal. Upon realizing the early starting motion, the swimmer attempts to stop this motion, trying to remain on the block. The Starter gives the “stand, please,” command, and the swimmer in lane 7 remains on the block and stands up. Is this a false start?**

Recommend Resolution: No, this is not a false start. The swimmer successfully responded to the “Stand, please,” command and remained on the block with the other swimmers in the heat.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2D, 101.1.3A

- 24. In the 100 yard butterfly, the Starter gives the “take your marks,” command, and the swimmers become stationary. The swimmer in lane 1 leaves their stationary position prior to the starting signal. Upon realizing the early starting motion, the swimmer attempts to stop this motion, trying to remain on the block. The Starter gives the “Stand, please,” command, and the swimmer in lane 1 falls into the pool. Is this a false start?**

Recommend Resolution: Yes, this is a false start. The rule states, “Any swimmer initiating a start before the starting signal is given shall be disqualified if the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter’s observation that a violation occurred.” The rule also states, “When a swimmer does not respond promptly to the command, ‘take your marks,’ the Starter shall immediately release all swimmers with the command ‘Stand please,’ upon which the swimmers may stand up or step off the blocks.” When this command is given, the swimmers may either stand up or step off the blocks; the swimmer in lane 1 did neither—but fell into the

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pool. Pending that the Referee independently observed and confirmed the Starter's observation of a false start, the swimmer in lane 1 should be disqualified and removed from the heat.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2D, 101.1.3A

- 25. In a heat of the 100 yard breaststroke, the Starter gives the “take your marks,” command. As several of the swimmers seem “wobbly” and struggle to promptly assume a stationary position, the Starter stands the heat. The swimmer in lane 4 has assumed a stationary position, and remains set in this stationary position as the other swimmers stand up. The Starter recommends to the Referee that the swimmer in lane 4 be disqualified for failing to obey the “Stand, please,” command. How should the Referee handle the situation?**

Recommended Resolution: The swimmer should not be disqualified. The rule states, “When a swimmer does not respond promptly to the command ‘take your marks,’ the Starter shall immediately release all swimmers with the command ‘Stand please,’ upon which the swimmers may stand up or step off the blocks.” The swimmers *may* stand up when the “Stand, please,” command is given; they are not required to stand up. The swimmer in lane 4 should not be disqualified.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2D, 101.1.5A

- 26. Excitement is in the air during the finals of the 200 yard butterfly. It is a big race for all of the swimmers involved and the crowd is very excited. The Referee blows the long whistle, signaling for the swimmers to step up onto the blocks. The swimmers step up onto the blocks, and the referee gives an outstretched arm to the Starter, turning the field over to the control of the Starter. The Starter waits several seconds for the crowd to quiet. Once quiet, the Starter gives the “take your marks,” command. The crowd again erupts in noise. How should the Starter proceed?**

Recommended Resolution: As soon as the noise begins again, the Starter should stand the heat, and then wait for the venue to become quiet before giving the “take your marks,” command again. If the issue persists, the Referee should ask the Starter to step down the heat, and the Referee should ask that an announcement be made regarding maintaining a quiet environment during the start.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2D, 102.11.1, 102.11.5, 102.12.1

- 27. During an age group session, a Starter is relatively inexperienced, and**



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whenever the Stand please command is given, it is delivered in a harsh and abrupt manner. As a result, multiple swimmers have fallen into the water in response to the “Stand, please,” command. How should the Referee handle the situation?

Recommended Resolution: The Referee should, in a respectful, educational, and encouraging way, suggest that the Starter use a quiet, calm, and conversational voice when giving the “Stand, please,” command, working with the Starter to gain improvement. Delivering the command in this manner, the swimmers will not be as alarmed by the command, and will more likely to respond to the command by standing up or by stepping off the blocks, as opposed to falling into the water. No false start should be called in this scenario, as the swimmers were reacting to the stand command.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2D, 102.11.1, 102.11.5, 102.12.1

- 28. A backstroke heat is started with one swimmer having curled his toes over the gutter prior to the start. The Starter and Referee did not notice. The Turn Judge did notice, but was unable to notify the Starter or Referee prior to the start of the heat. The swimmer was in a stationary position at the start. How should this be handled?**

Recommended Resolution: The race should continue, and the swimmer should not be disqualified. The rule states, “A swimmer shall not be disqualified for an illegal starting position at the start if the race is permitted to proceed. Enforcement of the correct starting position is the responsibility of the Starter.”

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2E, 101.4.1

- 29. At the start of the 100 yard backstroke, the swimmer in lane 2 stands on the gutter with their back to the pool and heels in the water. The Starter starts the race, and the swimmer dives backward from the gutter. Is this correct?**

Recommended Resolution: No, this is not correct. The race should never have been started. The backstroke rules state, “Standing in or on the gutter, placing the toes above the lip of the gutter, or bending the toes over the lip of the gutter, before or after the start, is prohibited.” However, the rules also state, “A swimmer shall not be disqualified for an illegal starting position at the start if the race is permitted to proceed. Enforcement of the correct starting position is the responsibility of the Starter.” Since the Starter allowed the race to continue, despite the swimmer’s illegal starting position, the swimmer cannot be disqualified.



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Applicable Rules: 101.1.2E, 101.4.1

- 30. At a championship meet, backstroke ledges are being used during the backstroke events. The Referee determines that the Turn Judge for each lane that is positioned at the start end of the pool will observe the placement of the toes of the swimmer in their lane to ensure that they are in a legal starting position, and will signal to the Starter once a legal starting position has been achieved. A coach complains to the Referee, claiming that the “enforcement of the correct starting position is the responsibility of the Starter.” Is the coach correct?**

Recommended Resolution: The rule states, “Enforcement of the correct starting position is the responsibility of the Starter.” That being said, nothing in the rules prohibits other officials from aiding the Starter in determining that a correct starting position has been achieved. This is a decision that is made at the discretion of the Referee.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2E, 101.4.1, 102.11.1, 102.11.5

- 31. In the 200 yard freestyle, a swimmer asks the Referee if they can swim the backstroke. The Referee replies yes, 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 gives an outstretched arm to the Starter and the Starter starts the race. Is this correct?**

Recommended Resolution: No, this is not correct. The freestyle rules state, “The forward start shall be used.” Thus, the swimmer started from an illegal starting position. However, the rules also state, “A swimmer shall not be disqualified for an illegal starting position at the start if the race is permitted to proceed. Enforcement of the correct starting position is the responsibility of the Starter.” The Starter should have asked the swimmer to assume a legal starting position prior to giving the “take your marks,” command.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.2E, 101.5.1, 102.23.1A(2)

- 32. At an age group meet, the swimmer in lane 3 starts before the starting signal, entering the water, during the 50 yard butterfly. The Starter stands the heat and approaches the Referee with the observation of a false start in lane 3. The Referee has independently observed and confirmed the observation but chooses to not remove the swimmer from the heat, not wanting to “humiliate” the swimmer and instead, allows the swimmer to swim with the heat disqualifying the swimmer at the end of the race. Is this correct?**

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Recommended Resolution: No, this is not correct. The rule states, “Any swimmer initiating a start before the starting signal is given shall be disqualified if the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter’s observation that a violation occurred. Swimmers remaining on the starting blocks shall be relieved from their starting positions with the ‘Stand up,’ command and may step off the blocks.” The swimmer should be disqualified and not permitted to swim with the heat.

Applicable Rule: 101.1.3A

- 33. At the start of the 200 yard breaststroke, the Starter gives the “take your marks,” command. The swimmer in lane 2 shoots forward and starts before the starting signal, but the motion is very subtle. The Starter records the observation of the false start and reports it to the Referee. The Referee did not record an observation. The Starter and Referee talk casually about what the Starter observed, and the Referee responds, “Okay, that’s fair. I’ll call it.” The swimmer is disqualified upon completion of the race. Is this proper protocol?**

Recommended Resolution: No, this is not proper protocol. The rule states, “Any swimmer initiating a start before the starting signal is given shall be disqualified if the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter’s observation that a violation occurred.” Since the Referee has discussed the potential violation with the Starter prior to recording an observation, any observation made is no longer independent, meaning that the swimmer should not be disqualified for a false start.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.3A, 101.1.3B

- 34. During the finals of the 50 yard freestyle, the Starter gives the “take your marks,” command. The swimmer in lane 4 clearly starts well before the starting signal. The race continues without recall. After the start, the Starter approaches the Referee with the observation of a false start in lane 4. The Referee had recorded the observation of a false start in lane 5. Seeing that the observations did not match, the Referee quietly whispers to the Starter, “Darn! I wasn’t sure which lane it was, but it was so obvious!” and quickly changes their recorded observation to lane 4. Is this correct protocol?**

Recommended Resolution: No, this is not correct protocol. The rule states, “Any swimmer initiating a start before the starting signal is given shall be disqualified if the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter’s observation that a violation occurred.” The Referee cannot “change the observation” after conferring with the Starter, as it would make that observation no longer independent.

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Regardless of how obvious the false start may have been, this is a situation where the swimmer receives the benefit of the doubt.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.3A, 101.1.3B

- 35. In the 100 yard breaststroke, the Starter gives the “take your marks,” command, and the swimmers become stationary. The swimmer in lane 6 leaves their stationary position prior to the starting signal. Upon realizing the early starting motion, the swimmer attempts to stop this motion, trying to remain on the block. The swimmer fails to halt this motion, and the starting signal is given. Is this a false start?**

Recommend Resolution: Yes, this is a false start. The rule states, “Any swimmer initiating a start before the starting signal is given shall be disqualified if the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter’s observation that a violation occurred.” Assuming that the false start was observed by the Starter and independently observed and confirmed by the Referee, the swimmer should be disqualified upon completion of the race.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.3A, 101.1.3B

- 36. In the 50 yard freestyle, the Starter gives the “take your marks,” command, and the swimmers become stationary. The swimmer in lane 2 leaves their stationary position prior to the starting signal. Is this a false start?**

Recommended Resolution: Yes, this is a false start. The rule states, “Any swimmer initiating a start before the starting signal is given shall be disqualified if the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter’s observation that a violation occurred.”

Applicable Rules: 101.1.3A, 101.1.3B

- 37. In the 200 yard individual medley, the Starter gives the “take your marks,” command, and the swimmers assume their stationary starting positions. The swimmer in lane 4 starts before the starting signal, After the start, the Starter approaches the Referee with an observation of a false start in lane 4, which the Referee also independently observed and confirmed. At the conclusion of the race, when the swimmer is notified that they have been disqualified for a false start, the swimmer claims that they heard somebody shout “Go!” which caused the swimmer to start. The Referee did not hear this occur. How should the situation be handled?**



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Recommended Resolution: The Referee should investigate the situation, consulting the Starter, and possibly other officials at the start end of the pool, to determine whether or not somebody did, in fact, yell “Go!” during the start. If the Referee is able to confirm that this did, in fact, happen, the Referee may allow the entire heat to have the opportunity to re-swim the race. If the Referee cannot confirm that somebody did, in fact, yell “Go!” at the start of the race, the disqualification should be upheld, as the Referee cannot overturn the disqualification simply because the swimmer claims to have heard someone shout at the start, as it would set a precedent that could not be sustained.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.3A, 101.1.3B, 102.11.1, 102.11.5

- 38. At an LSC championship, during the finals of the 200 yard freestyle, the Starter gives the “take your marks,” command, and the swimmer in lane 4 starts well before the starting signal. The race continues without recall. After the start, the Starter approaches the Referee, with the observation of a false start in lane 5. The Referee has also independently observed and confirmed the Starter’s observation of a false start in lane 5. At the end of the race, the swimmer in lane 5 is notified of the disqualification. The swimmer claims that they did not false start. This swimmer’s coach—as well as several other coaches in the venue—claim that the false start was called on the wrong lane. A parent even has video to prove that the Starter and Referee were incorrect! How should the situation be handled?**

Recommended Resolution: The Referee should investigate the situation. If the available evidence makes it clear that the false start was called on the wrong lane, the Referee may withdraw the false start disqualification. The swimmer in lane 4 should not be charged with the false start, as a false start in lane 4 was not observed by the Starter and independently observed and confirmed by the Referee. In any case, the Referee should not view or consider the video offered by the parent, as the rule states, “Video replay footage from cameras approved in writing in advance of the competition by the Program and Events Coordinator may be used to review stroke or turn infractions called on deck.” A video provided by a parent does not meet any of these requirements.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.3A, 101.1.3B, 102.11.1, 102.11.5, 102.21.15

- 39. During the finals of the 100 yard backstroke, the Starter gives the “take your marks,” command. The swimmer in lane 1 starts well before the starting signal. The race continues without recall. The Starter does not approach the Referee with any observation of a false start, but the Referee raises their hand to disqualify the swimmer in lane 1 for a false start, knowing that the**



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Referee “has the authority to disqualify a swimmer(s) for any violation of the rules that the Referee personally observes.” Is this correct protocol?

Recommended Resolution: No, this is not correct protocol. The rule states, “Any swimmer initiating a start before the starting signal is given shall be disqualified if the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter’s observation that a violation occurred.” The rule is very clear that it takes both the Starter and the Referee to disqualify a swimmer for a false start.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.3A, 101.1.3B, 102.11.2

- 40. The Starter for an age group session is relatively inexperienced. The Referee and the Starter are standing on the lane 1 side of the pool, and the Referee observes, throughout the session, that the Starter fails to observe false starts occurring in lanes 1 and 2. How should the Referee handle the situation?**

Recommended Resolution: The Referee should suggest that the Starter try standing in a different position, one that will allow a better observation of all 8 lanes simultaneously. This will help to achieve fair starts. As false starts must be observed by the Starter and independently observed and confirmed by the Referee, none of the swimmers, in these cases where the Starter has failed to observe the false starts, should be disqualified.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.3A, 101.1.3B, 102.12.1

- 41. In the 400 yard individual medley, the Starter gives the “take your marks,” command, and the swimmers assume their stationary starting positions. The swimmer in lane 2 starts before the starting signal, and the Starter stands the heat. The Starter approaches the Referee with an observation of a false start in lane 2, which the Referee also independently observed and confirmed. When the Referee removes the swimmer in lane 2 from the heat, the swimmer informs the Referee that they saw a flash, which caused them to start before the starting signal. The Referee personally did not observe a flash. How should the situation be handled?**

Recommended Resolution: The Referee should quickly investigate the situation, first consulting the Starter to see if the starter observed a flash. If this takes more than a moment or two, the Referee should ask the Starter to step down the heat and ask the field to relax, so as to not disrupt their competitive environment. If, given the information available, the Referee determines that there was, in fact, a flash, the swimmer should be allowed to swim with the heat. If there is no



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confirmation that there was a flash, the swimmer should be disqualified for a false start and removed from the heat. The Referee cannot overturn the disqualification simply because the swimmer claims to have seen a flash, as it would set a precedent that could not be sustained.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.3A, 102.11.1, 102.11.5

- 42. In the 50 yard freestyle, the swimmers in all lanes become stationary following the "take your marks," command. The swimmer in lane 4 starts before the starting signal. The Starter recalls the heat, and upon returning to the start end, the Referee blows the long whistle, signaling for the swimmers to step up onto the blocks. The coach of one of the other swimmers in the heat approaches the Referee, claiming that the false start in lane 4 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, as the rules direct, in the event of a false start, "If the starting signal has been given before the disqualification is declared, the race shall continue without recall." Therefore, even though the Starter recalled the race in reaction to the false start, the recall should not have taken place. The rule states, "If the recall signal is activated no swimmer shall be charged with a false start." The swimmer in lane 4 should not be charged with a false start and should be allowed to swim.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.3B, 101.1.3C

- 43. In the 100 yard backstroke, the Starter gives the "take your marks," command and then the starting signal. The swimmer in lane 3 starts before the starting signal. After the start, the Starter accidentally activates the recall signal, and the heat is recalled. The Starter recorded an observation of a false start in lane 3, and the Referee independently observed and confirmed the Starter's observation. The swimmer in lane 3 is disqualified and removed from the heat, as the false start was independent from the recall. Is this correct?**

Recommended Resolution: No, this is not correct. The rule states, "If the recall signal is activated, no swimmer shall be charged with a false start." The swimmer in lane 3 should not be disqualified for a false start and should be allowed to swim with the heat.

Applicable Rule: 101.1.3C

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- 44. During the 200 yard breaststroke, the Starter gives the “take your marks,” command. Several of the swimmers appear to be taking a while to assume a stationary starting position, so the Starter stands the heat. The swimmer in lane 6 jolts forward in a starting motion in response to the “Stand, please,” command, entering the water. Should the swimmer be disqualified?**

Recommended Resolution: No, the swimmer should not be disqualified. The rule states, “A swimmer who would otherwise be charged with a false start may be relieved of the charge if the false start was caused by the swimmer’s reaction to the ‘Stand up,’ command.”

Applicable Rule: 101.1.3D

- 45. In the 200 yard backstroke, the Referee blows the first long whistle. The swimmer in lane 3 leaps far into the pool and slowly sinks to the bottom of the pool, slowly rising to the surface, moving farther away from the start end, after which the Referee blows the second long whistle. While the other seven swimmers quickly place their feet, the swimmer in lane 3 very slowly swims to the wall and places their feet. The Starter reports the swimmer in lane 3 to the Referee for delay of meet. Should the Referee disqualify the swimmer?**

Recommended Resolution: This is a call that requires good judgment from the Referee. Did the swimmer delay so much that they were creating a problem for the other swimmers? Swimmers have different ways to prepare to race and the Referee should not interfere with these preparations unless they negatively affect the other competitors. An alternative to a disqualification might be to discuss the situation after the race with the swimmer and/or coach. This is especially useful for the first occurrence of this type of activity.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.5A, 101.1.5B

- 46. During the 100 yard breaststroke, the Referee is about to blow the long whistle, signaling for the swimmers to step up onto the blocks, when the goggles of the swimmer in lane 8 break. The swimmer in lane 8 approaches the Referee, asking for a few moments to obtain a new pair of goggles. Should the Referee grant the request?**

Recommended Resolution: Yes, the Referee should grant the request. Obtaining a new pair of goggles should only take a few moments and should not be considered delay of meet.

Applicable Rules: 101.1.5A, 101.1.5B, 102.11.1, 102.11.5

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- 47. During the preliminaries of the 50 yard freestyle, the Referee blows the long whistle, signaling for the swimmers to step up onto the blocks. The swimmer in lane 6 is missing. The referee gives an outstretched arm to the Starter, and the Starter delivers the “take your marks” command. When the Starter gives the starting signal, the starting device beeps twice, confusing the swimmers. The Starter recalls the heat. When the swimmers return to the blocks to re-start their heat, the swimmer in lane 6 appears. Should the swimmer in lane 6 be allowed to swim?**

Recommended Resolution: No, the swimmer in lane 6 should not be allowed to swim. The rule states, “The Referee shall disqualify a swimmer who fails to appear at the starting platform ready to swim in time for the initial start of his/her heat.”

Applicable Rules: 101.1.5B, 102.11.1, 102.11.5, 102.12.1

- 48. During the 100 yard backstroke, a swimmer in lane 3 chooses to utilize the backstroke ledge. While all of the toes are in contact with the ledge, none of the toes are in contact with the touchpad or end wall. Is this legal?**

Recommended Resolution: No, this is not legal. The rule states, “When using a backstroke ledge at the start, at least one toe of each foot must be in contact with the end wall or face of the touchpad.”

Applicable Rule: 101.4.1

- 49. After the start of the 200 yard breaststroke, the Referee hears a second beep come from the electronic starting system. Several of the swimmers in the heat stop swimming and look around before continuing the race, while some swimmers continue swimming. How should the situation be handled?**

Recommended Resolution: The Referee should ask the Starter to recall the heat. This is one of the situations where it is very beneficial for the Starter to have the microphone in a position that readily allows activation of a recall. In the event that the heat is not recalled, the Referee may offer all of the swimmers in the heat the option to re-swim the race. Any swimmers that choose to re-swim will have the times from the re-swims replace the times from their original swims.

Applicable Rules: 102.11.1, 102.11.5, 102.12.1

- 50. In the 100 yard butterfly, the Referee blows the long whistle and all swimmers step up onto the blocks. After the Referee turns the heat over to the Starter,**

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the Starter gives the “take your marks,” command. The Starter’s voice waivers and is somewhat low, but all swimmers appear to have taken their marks. At the start, the swimmers in both lanes 7 and 8 start late. How should the situation be handled?

Recommended Resolution: If the Referee is immediately able to determine that the start was unfair, ask the Starter to recall the heat. If not, the Referee should investigate the situation. During that investigation, if the Referee determines that circumstances, such as a faulty speaker, excessive noise, or the Starter failing to sufficiently project the “take your marks,” command contributed to unfair racing conditions, a re-swim may be offered to all the swimmers in that heat. Any swimmers that choose to re-swim will have the times from their re-swims replace the times from their original swims.

Applicable Rules: 102.11.1, 102.11.5, 102.12.1

- 51. In the 100 yard freestyle, the Starter gives the “take your marks,” command, and the swimmers assume their stationary starting positions. The swimmer in lane 8 starts before the starting signal, but the starting signal is given. The Referee heard a door slam just as the Starter was sending the heat, which clearly prompted the starting motion of the swimmer in lane 8. How should the situation be handled?**

Recommended Resolution: The rule states, “Should a foul endanger the success of a swimmer(s), the Referee may allow the affected swimmer(s) to reswim the event.” As the Referee clearly heard the door slam, and was able to see the impact that it had on the start, the swimmer in Lane 8 should be offered a reswim.

Applicable Rules: 102.11.1, 102.11.5, 102.21.10

- 52. At an age group meet, the starting system is providing considerable feedback. A screechy noise—that sounds similar to the starting signal—occurs on nearly every start. In some heats, the swimmers start in response to the screech instead of in response to the starting signal. How should the situation be handled?**

Recommended Resolution: First and foremost, the Starter should work with the Referee, the facility staff, and the equipment to determine what steps may be taken to mitigate the problem. These steps could include the Starter standing in a different place, turning down the volume on the starting system, repositioning the speaker on the starting system, or, if another starting system is available, replacing the starting system. The swimmers starting in response to the screech should not



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be disqualified for false starts; if unfair starts occur because of the feedback, those heats may be recalled or reswum.

Applicable Rules: 102.11.1, 102.11.5, 102.12.1, 102.21.10

- 53. In the 200 yard individual medley, the Starter gives the “take your marks,” command and gives the starting signal. The swimmer in lane 1 starts before the starting signal. Meanwhile, the swimmers in lane 7 and 8 do not start, as they could not hear the commands and starting signal due to a speaker malfunction. The Referee asks the Starter to recall the heat because the speaker malfunction caused an unfair start. The Referee also independently observes and confirms the Starter’s observation of a false start in lane 1. When the swimmers make their way back to the start end, the Referee removes the swimmer in lane 1 from the heat, determining the false start to be independent of the speaker malfunction. Is this correct?**

Recommended Resolution: A heat may be recalled if the start is unfair. It cannot be fair to some swimmers and unfair to others. If the heat is recalled, the swimmer in lane 1 is not disqualified, as a recall relieves all swimmers of a false start.

Applicable Rules: 101.3.C , 102.11.1, 102.11.5, 102.12.1

- 54. In the 400 yard individual medley, the Starter recalls a heat determining it to be an unfair start. The swimmers in lanes 2 and 4 stop as soon as the recall signal is activated, the swimmers in lanes 3 and 7 stop after swimming 50 yards, and the swimmers in lanes 1, 5, 6, and 8 continue swimming and do not stop. How should the situation be handled?**

Recommended Resolution: If the swimmers in lanes 1, 5, 6, and 8 do not respond to the recall following an effort to recall the swimmers, the Referee should allow them to continue swimming. At the completion of the race, the Referee should speak to the swimmers in this heat (and likely their coaches), and offer the opportunity to re-swim the race. For any swimmer who elects to re-swim the race, only the time from the re-swim will count.

Applicable Rules: 102.11.1, 102.11.5, 102.12.1

- 55. In the 50 yard freestyle, the Starter recalls the heat determining it to be an unfair start. All the swimmers promptly respond to the recall signal, stopping their race and returning to the start end. The Referee immediately blows the long whistle, signaling for the swimmers to step up onto the blocks. A coach of one of the swimmers involved approaches the Referee asking that the**



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swimmers receive a few minutes of rest before having to swim again. The Referee denies the coach's request stating "It's only a 50. They'll be fine." Is this correct protocol?

Recommended Resolution: No, this is not correct protocol. Regardless of the length of the race, the swimmers should be allowed a few minutes to catch their breath and recover prior to starting again. The Referee should have offered this option to the swimmers when they returned to the start end.

Applicable Rules: 102.11.1, 102.11.5, 102.12.1

- 56. During an age group session, a swimmer is seeded in heat 3, lane 6 of the 100 yard freestyle. One of the lane timers misreads the timer's sheet, thinking that the swimmer is supposed to be in heat 4. The timer stops the swimmer from stepping up onto the block at the long whistle. The Referee and Starter do not realize what has happened, and they start the race. Should the swimmer be allowed to swim?**

Recommended Resolution: Yes, the swimmer should be allowed to swim. The rule states that the Head Lane Timer shall "determine whether the swimmer or relay team is present and in the correct lane, heat and event, and record the names and order of relay swimmers prior to the start of the race, and determine that the relay swimmers are swimming in the order listed." The swimmer should not be penalized by an error made by a timer. If an empty lane is available in that same event, the Referee may insert the swimmer into that lane. If not, the Referee should find another suitable place for that swimmer to swim, such as by creating a new heat of the same event, by splitting an existing heat into two heats.

Applicable Rules: 102.11.1, 102.11.5, 102.16.2A

- 57. During the 200 yard freestyle, the Referee blows the long whistle, signaling for the swimmers to step up onto the blocks. A swimmer does not step up in lane 8. The Referee gives an outstretched arm to the Starter. The Starter gives the "take your marks," command followed by the starting signal. When the swimmers are midway down the pool, a swimmer steps up onto the block in lane 8, dives in, and begins swimming. How should the Referee handle the situation?**

Recommended Resolution: The Referee should first investigate the situation to determine who swam in lane 8. If finding it is the swimmer who was intended to swim in lane 8, the swimmer should be charged with failure to compete ("no-show") and any corresponding penalties associated with failure to compete. The swimmer

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did not partake in the start of the race and therefore failed to compete in the race. On the other hand, if the Referee determines that the swimmer was not entered in said heat, the swimmer shall be disqualified from his next individual event, as the rule states, “Any swimmer not entered in a race who enters the pool or course in the area in which said race is being conducted before all swimmers therein have completed the race shall be barred from the next individual event in which that swimmer is entered on that day or the next meet day, whichever is first.”

Applicable Rules: 102.11.1, 102.11.5, 102.21.8

58. At a local senior meet, the adjustable back plate on the lane 1 starting block malfunctions midway through the preliminaries of the 100 yard butterfly and cannot be fixed. How should the situation be handled?

Recommended Resolution: If one adjustable back plate becomes inoperable, the adjustable back plates must be removed from all the blocks to provide a fair competitive environment for the swimmers. The Referee should ask the facility personnel to remove the adjustable back plates from all the starting blocks. The preliminaries should be continued without the adjustable back plates on the blocks. The swimmers in previous heats should not be required to re-swim without the adjustable back plate, and their times achieved should remain unchanged. If the adjustable back plate is later fixed and/or a replacement adjustable back plate is found, it should not be introduced midway through the event, but may be used for subsequent events and during finals.

Applicable Rules: 102.11.1, 102.11.5, 103.14.3

59. At a local senior meet, the backstroke ledge in lane 7 malfunctions midway through the preliminaries of the 200 yard backstroke and cannot be fixed. How should the situation be handled?

Recommended Resolution: If one backstroke ledge becomes inoperable, no swimmers should be permitted to use the ledge going forward. The preliminaries should be continued without the use of the backstroke ledges. The swimmers in previous heats should not be required to re-swim without the use of the backstroke ledge, and their times achieved should remain unchanged. If the ledge is later fixed and/or a replacement ledge is found, it should not be introduced midway through the event, but may be used for subsequent events and during finals.

Applicable Rules: 102.11.1, 102.11.5, 103.15

60. A swimmer is seeded in heat 7, lane 2 of the 100 yard freestyle. One of the

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lane timers directs this swimmer to step up when the Referee blows the long whistle for heat 6. The Referee and Starter do not realize that the incorrect swimmer is on the block, and they proceed in the starting sequence. Should the swimmer be disqualified?

Recommended Resolution: The swimmer should not be disqualified. The rules state that the Head Lane Timer shall “determine whether the swimmer or relay team is present and in the correct lane, heat and event, and record the names and order of relay swimmers prior to the start of the race, and determine that the relay swimmers are swimming in the order listed.” However, it is important that the error is communicated to the Administrative Official/Referee so that the time achieved is credited to the correct swimmer.

Applicable Rule: 102.16.2A

- 61. A session is being conducted using flyover starts. At the conclusion of heat 3, the swimmer in lane 2, upon finishing his race, sculls away from the wall to read the scoreboard, not realizing that he is posing a distraction to the swimmer in heat 4, lane 2, who is on the block preparing to start. How should the situation be handled?**

Recommended Resolution: The Referee should direct the Starter to ask the swimmer in heat 3, lane 2, to return to the wall. If the swimmer complies, no further action is necessary. In the event the swimmer refuses to comply, the rule states, “Obstructing or otherwise interfering with another swimmer shall disqualify the offender, subject to the discretion of the Referee.” This follow-up action should only be used as a last resort.

Applicable Rule: 102.21.7

- 62. In a 50 yard freestyle heat, the Referee notices that the electronic timing system did not automatically start. As a result, the Starter is asked to recall the heat. Is this correct procedure?**

Recommended Resolution: No, this is not correct procedure. The rules provide a means for integrating and adjusting backup times, in the event of a timing system malfunction affecting an entire heat. The Referee should instruct the timing system operator to manually start the system, allowing the Administrative Official/Referee to adjust and integrate the times using the method provided in the rules. Additionally, no swimmer shall be required to reswim the race due to equipment failure.



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Applicable Rule: 102.23.4E, 102.23.1D

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