

Referee Starter, a Day in the Life

2026 Update



I. Introduction

This session is designed for experienced Referees and Starters. The objective of this session is to review a typical meet, to focus on meet procedures, discuss situations that may occur and discuss how the meet official should conduct themselves to ensure that a fair and equitable meet takes place. The session follows the flow of a typical meet. We will also take some time to demonstrate, discuss and critique the proper starting procedure.

The assumption for an actual meet is that the Referee and Starter will work together as a team. Therefore, this session is designed to encourage that teamwork, by having Referees and Starters attend together, discuss the sequence of events that will take place during the day and decide how they will best work together. This includes which functions each will undertake prior to the meet, during the meet, and after.

II. Philosophy for Officiating:

The Referee is responsible for providing a fair competition for all swimmers. When evaluating conditions, situations, and circumstances the Referee's guiding principle should be fair competition. This means recording properly observed disqualifications, providing a fair and balanced deck through proper management of jurisdiction and application of technical rules, and adopting a helpful rather than a punitive attitude toward rules enforcement.

Officials are not on the deck to see how many competitors they can disqualify. They are there to ensure that the competition is conducted in a completely fair and equitable competitive environment. Officials should be properly trained and act professionally while on deck. **Officials are representing the NVSL, not their individual teams.**

The Referee should arrive in time to manage the pre-meet activities and should be knowledgeable about all NVSL and USA Swimming rules. The Referee and all officials should treat each swimmer and each team equally. Remember that the benefit of the doubt always goes to the swimmer. This means if a judge seems uncertain, or if there is concern or doubt about a disqualification, the swimmer should not be disqualified. Swimmers should not be penalized for the actions of another. If the actions of an official, a spectator, or another swimmer affect a swimmer's performance, the swimmer should not be disqualified and may be deserving of a re-swim. The Referee should note all DQ's and open lanes on their meet sheet to compare with the official meet sheet at the conclusion of the meet.

Referees and Starters should regularly review the information posted in the documents section of the NVSL website.

III. Before Meet Day

Talk to your Meet Manager (dual meet = host Team Rep; divisional = Div Coordinator) about:



- Key officials for the session/meet. (Try to ensure number of judges is adequate for pool configuration.) Be sure Marshals are present to be briefed and on duty BEFORE warm ups start.
- Unusual, special requests from clubs or any other issues that came up during the meet exchange (e.g., swimmers with a disability, unofficial relays).
- Confirm the Meet Manager has the required supplies/equipment for deck officials (i.e., watches, starter system & backups, meet sheets for all officials, pencils, DQ slips, relay take off slips.)
- Make sure that the starting system and back-up system will be at the pool.
- Safety overall (warm-ups, when/where lifeguards on duty, any points of concern, etc.)

Review the rules. In particular, review anything that you are concerned may come up. Review the substitution and scratch rules and rules about eligible swimmers.

IV. Pre-Meet Preparations

The Referee should arrive well before warm ups (NVSL recommendation is at least 90 minutes). Check in with pool staff and conduct a facility check, look specifically at:

- Lane lines and 15-meter mark.
- Flags – 15 feet from end of pool for NVSL, approximately 7 feet above water, 3 flags over each lane, if flags have lane numbers, make sure they are over the correct lanes.
- Starting system and back-up system are available and charged.
- Diving boards, ladders, obstructions are out of the way.
- Locate skimmer covers.
- Clerk of Course area – understand traffic flow.
- Tables for recorders, ribbon writers, and data entry.
- Announcer area.
- Team, coach and spectator areas.
- Relay take-off slips are fastened/prepared in the appropriate grouping for distribution to each relay take off judge.
- US Flag is flying and there is a method to play the national anthem.
- Obvious safety concerns.

Warm ups: The biggest concern during warm ups is safety:

- Check with life guards.
- Make sure Marshals are watching the pool.
- Instruct coaches on safe warm up practices: feet first entry, no pushing, horse play, running, and diving starts must be supervised by coaches in one-way lanes.
- Give each team equal opportunity.

Situation: The host Team Rep comes to you at 7:40 am and asks if it is OK for the home team to get in at that time because the other team is not there yet, and your Coach would like some extra warm up time (scheduled warm-up time is 8:00 am). What do you do?

Answer: You can allow the home team to warm up early, but each team must be given an equal amount of warm up time. Each team is normally allowed 20 minutes.



Key discussion points:

- Each team should be given the same amount of time normally 20 minutes.
- You may deny or grant the request to warm up early. There should be no additional warm up time allowed for the home team.
- You may also want to explain to the visiting team and coach that while the home team warmed up early you will ensure that both teams will have the same amount of warm up time.

Applicable Rules: NVSL Rule 1.i. (does not set a specific length for warm ups, if a different warm-up time period is to be used both Team Reps and coaches need to concur).

Referee conducts the following briefings:

Prior to warm ups:

- Marshals:
 - Confirm position during warm ups and during meet.
 - Stress the importance of safety.
 - Safe warm up practices (feet first entry, no pushing, no horse play, diving only while supervised by coaches in one-way lanes).
 - Do not allow swimmers to sit on lane lines.
 - Sportsmanship – no foul language, no intimidation, NO ONE IN BABY POOLS.
 - Foul weather protocol.
 - Marshal briefing card on NVSL website.

During warm ups:

- Starter
 - Make sure the starting equipment is working and you know where the backup starter is.
 - Ensure that officials (e.g., Marshals, Starter, S&T) are paying attention to the pool during warm ups.
 - Whistle starts.
 - When you want the Starter to give optional commands.
 - Discuss where the Starter will stand for forward and back starts.
 - The signal the Referee uses to stop a start if needed.
 - Minimize using the microphone for non-start announcements.
 - Reasonable quiet at start (not golf course quiet).
 - How to handle false starts.
 - No recall procedure for false starts but recall procedure is used if an unfair start occurs.
 - Swimmers with disabilities (if applicable).
 - Other duties you may ask the Starter to perform (e.g. check readiness of next heat).
- Team Reps:
 - Determine if there are any questions/concerns.
 - Determine if there are any swimmers with a disability.
 - Check for problems with the meet entries.
 - Discuss how you will you communicate with them during the meet.
 - Review foul weather protocol



- Have the Team Reps help the Announcer with any commonly mispronounced names.
- Find out if it is possible that a league record might be set.
- Discuss rules for suits and caps.
- Clerk of Course
 - Clerk of Course location – ascertain how swimmers will get from Clerk of Course to the start end of pool.
 - Make sure both teams have equal access to Clerk of Course.
 - How will you communicate with Clerk of Course (Clerk of Course can help by letting you know in advance when swimmers are missing).
 - Ready area (near start end of pool) and making sure swimmers are at ready area in time.
 - Remind swimmers to be quiet at the start.
 - Remind swimmers to take care of any “needs” well before their race.
 - Coaches are not allowed in the Clerk of Course area.
 - Sportsmanship.
 - Discuss rules for suits and caps.
- Announcer
 - Pre-meet timeline (warm up exchanges, S&T briefing, timer briefing, time check).
 - Check to ensure Announcer knows how to pronounce names of all competitors. (Check with visiting Team Rep.).
 - Discuss when you want mandatory announcements (5 minutes prior to start, with your concurrence; just prior to breaks, etc.).
 - Starting sequence (chirps, long whistle, and when Announcer should announce names and event).
 - Discuss how you will communicate during the meet.
 - Announce score periodically but suspend if meet gets too lopsided.
 - Announce pool/NVSL records.
 - At the start of the meet, remind the audience for quiet at the start and no flash photography at the start.
- Chief Timer
 - Determine how the Chief Timer will signal you that timers are ready.
 - Determine if the Chief Timer is comfortable giving the timer briefing.
 - Check times for consistency.
 - Head lane timer should check names of swimmers.
 - Watch to make sure towels are removed promptly if they are used.
- Coaches
 - Coaches are not allowed in Clerk of Course or in the starting area.
 - Sportsmanship.
 - Team area and designated coaches viewing area.
 - Safety during warm ups.
 - Swimwear and caps.
- Stroke and Turn briefing:
 - **Use the briefing card from the NVSL website.**
 - **Find a place for the briefing that is quiet.**
 - **Schedule the time for the briefing that will allow sufficient time to cover all the material and will end with adequate time before the meet starts.**
 - No clothing indicating NVSL teams (or advertising alcohol or tobacco).
 - Be impartial.



- Judge to the rules.
- Proper position at the edge of the pool. You will get wet.
- Cover all lanes equally.
- Benefit of the doubt goes to the swimmer.
- Raise hand briefly, the Referee does not need to confirm at that time.
- Be prepared to say what you saw, why it was a violation and where you were relative to the swimmer.
- Avoid discussions with parents, coaches, Team Reps. Ask people who approach them to talk to the Referee.
- Accommodations for swimmers with disabilities (if applicable).
- Discuss the rules of each stroke.
- Determine how the 15-meter mark will be judged. Do not ask a judge to watch the 15-meter mark then run to the end of the pool.
- Assignments, rotation and jurisdiction.
- Best practice is to try to resolve DQs before the start of the next heat, but this is not a rule.

Situation: During the S&T briefing an S&T judge states, “I have been doing this for 10 seasons. I don’t need to sit through the briefing.” What do you do?

Answer: The S&T briefing is an important part of focusing the officials on the upcoming events and is a USA swimming and NVSL requirement. It is also an opportunity to discuss specific aspects of this competition. It is important that the S&T judges participate in the briefing. If the Official **refuses** to attend the briefing, they should not be allowed to work the meet. If an official arrives late to the briefing, the Referee should attempt to make sure they understand the protocol to be used and go over the strokes if time permits.

Key Points:

- Discuss different ways to engage the S&T judges in the briefing.
- The briefing provides an opportunity to discuss new rule interpretations, unusual or new situations, etc.
- The briefing can be used to set the tone for the meet.
- Discuss how to handle someone who is late.

Applicable Rules: USA swimming Rule 102.11.1, NVSL recommended procedures for meets Rule 11

Situation: Although you have been assured that there are sufficient officials to conduct the meet, during the S&T briefing one of the judges asks if there have been any recent rule changes as they have not been to a clinic in 3 years. What do you do?

Answer: NVSL rules are clear that to officiate at a NVSL meet, the official must have attended a clinic within the past 2 years. You ask the judge if they have a current valid USA Swimming certification as S&T. If they do, this may be accepted. If the judge does not have valid USA Swimming certification and has not attended a NVSL or other acceptable clinic in more than 2 years, you will have to politely explain that they cannot work as an S&T judge.

Key Points:

- Look for a substitute judge.



- If a substitute cannot be located, adjust jurisdiction to balance as best as possible.
- Avoid taking a quadrant as Referee.

Applicable Rules: USA swimming Rule 102.10.2, NVSL Officials Qualification Procedures

Accommodating swimmers with disabilities:

Situation: The host Team Rep approaches you with a 14-year-old swimmer. She explains that the swimmer sprained his ankle at baseball practice this week. He will be swimming breaststroke but can't turn his feet outward because of the ankle bandage that his doctor has put on the ankle. The Team Rep asks that the S&T judges not judge the "feet turned outward" for the swimmer as an accommodation under the USA Swimming Rule 105.1.1 which allows accommodations for swimmers with disabilities. What do you do?

Answer: A temporary sports injury is not a disability as defined in USA swimming rules. An accommodation cannot be made for this swimmer.

Key Points:

- Permanent physical or cognitive impairment.
- Substantially limits one or more life activities.
- Medical documentation is not required.
- Coach or Team Rep must notify the Referee before competition and discuss the accommodation. (Explain why notification before the competition is important.)
- Referee determines if the accommodation can be met, instructs the Starter and judges.
- Discuss possible accommodations (demonstration of starting a hearing-impaired swimmer later in the clinic).
- If a part of the body is missing or cannot be used it cannot be judged.

Applicable Rules: USA swimming Rule 105.1.

Just before the meet:

- Check skimmer covers.
- Location of members of the teams.
- The pool is clear.
- Officials are in place.
- Swimmers are at the Clerk of Course.
- Time check.
- Announcements and national anthem.

V. Starting Philosophy

Starters are charged with a great amount of responsibility in seeing that one swimmer does not gain an advantage over the others during the start. This responsibility requires concentration, quick reactions and fair decisions. It takes practice to become a good Starter. With experience, the Starter will be able to accurately judge when the field is ready to race. This will help to prevent the false starts caused by the swimmers being jumpy or in a hurry because they aren't ready.



It is the Starter's responsibility to provide every swimmer with a fair start, not "catch swimmers." This requires carefully observing the field and making sure swimmers are ready and have taken their mark before starting the race. If a swimmer is jittery, slow to take a mark or is struggling with the starting position, stand the field to allow the swimmers to settle.

Starters should speak in a conversational tone, avoiding rapid instructions and sharp commands. The voice of a good Starter will lead the swimmers into their starting positions, not break their concentration with unexpected orders or remarks. At the same time, the Starter must protect all of the competitors by not allowing any one swimmer to gain an unfair advantage. In general, the Starter should avoid extraneous conversation across the microphone. Swimmers should associate your voice with starting direction. Provide additional or optional direction to swimmers such as, "Swimmers step in," as the Referee requests.

As a Starter you should be constantly thinking of the swimmers and relaxing them without distracting them or breaking their concentration. Make sure that swimmers have taken their mark and are settled before activating the starting signal. A short pause will ensure the swimmers are settled.

Reminder of the starting sequence: 4 or 5 chirps; Announcer announces event and swimmers, long whistle; Starter states the event, "take your marks," starting signal

(Starter discussion)

As a Starter, what should you do if the field does not settle quickly?

What can you do if a swimmer does not respond promptly on two successive commands to take your marks?

What are the aspects of a good start?

Starting a hearing-impaired swimmer.

- Demonstrate the starting technique for a hearing-impaired swimmer.
- Discuss possible accommodations such as moving the lane of the hearing-impaired swimmer.

VI. Judging False Starts

WHAT IS A FALSE START?

Information provided by USA Swimming Rules and Officials Committees, September 2012. Other helpful training references can be found at www.usaswimming.org in the member resources section.

The rules states, "When all swimmers are stationary, the Starter shall give the starting signal" (101.1.2.c) and "Any swimmer starting before the starting signal is given may be disqualified if the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter's observation" (101.1.3A).

So what constitutes a false start? These scenarios should help you paint the picture.



FALSE START SCENARIO #1

Swimmer leaves the set or stationary position prior to the starting signal. The starting signal is then given. The race proceeds and, assuming the Starter observed the early start and the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter's observation, the offending swimmer is disqualified at the conclusion of the race. Rule 101.1.3B applies. **This is a false start.**

FALSE START SCENARIO #2

Swimmer leaves the set or stationary position prior to the starting signal. The swimmer upon realizing the early starting motion attempts to catch himself/herself. Starter says absolutely nothing, and the swimmer fails to halt the forward motion and goes into the pool. Rule 101.1.3A applies. **This is a false start.**

FALSE START SCENARIO #3

Exactly the same facts as #2 above, but this time the Starter says "stand please" after the swimmer leaves the set or stationary position. The seven other swimmers stand or step down from the blocks. The offending swimmer struggles, but once again is unable to halt the forward motion and falls into the pool. Unlike scenario #2 above, here the Starter said "stand please", but that does not change the false start result. The rule is clear that the "stand" command is for the benefit of the other swimmers on the starting blocks. When the stand command is issued, the athletes have the option of standing or stepping off the blocks. The offending swimmer did neither. The swimmer fell into the pool just like the swimmer in scenario #2. Rule 101.1.3A applies. **This is a false start. Under this scenario, the offending swimmer is disqualified but they will still be allowed to swim the race.**

FALSE START SCENARIO #4

Exactly the same facts as scenarios #2 and #3 above. However, this time when the command "stand please" is issued, the offending swimmer struggles, but is able to stand or step off the blocks. Rule 101.1.3A applies. **This is NOT a false start.** Why? Because the swimmer remained on the blocks or deck like everyone else in the heat, and no starting signal ever sounded.

FALSE START SCENARIO #5

Exactly the same facts as scenarios #2 and #3 above. However, when the Starter gives the "stand please" command a swimmer(s) other than the offending swimmer instantly bolts from the blocks and enters the water. Rule 101.1.3D applies. The swimmer(s) clearly started in reaction to the "stand" command. **This is NOT a false start.**

FALSE START SCENARIO #6

The swimmer, upon hearing the command "take your marks" starts down to take a set or stationary position. The swimmer loses his/her balance before coming set and falls into the pool. Rule 101.1.2C applies. The swimmer should be given the opportunity to come to his/her set or stationary position prior to the start. A loss of balance prevented that, and clearly this swimmer never engaged in any starting action. **This is NOT a false start.**



FALSE START SCENARIOS DEVELOPED FOR NVSL

SCENARIO #7

The swimmer, upon hearing the command “take your marks” starts down to take a set or stationary position. The swimmer seems to set momentarily, jerks forward, catches themselves and resets prior to the Starter sounding the starting signal. The Starter then sounds the starting signal and starts the race. The swimmer was properly set before the starting signal sounded.

This is not a false start.

If the swimmer indicates that there was an errant sound/flash that caused the movement, the referee should investigate by talking with nearby timers and officials to determine if the distraction is verifiable.

If the false start occurs before the starting signal is sounded, the heat should be told to “stand”; the false be adjudicated immediately; any swimmer charged with a false start will be disqualified but will still be allowed to swim. After the race has started the DQ slip will be written and delivered to the Team Rep. The Referee is not to have any discussions with the swimmer.

VII. Events

A. Freestyle

Situation: The 9-10 boys’ freestyler in lane 4 finishes well ahead of the other swimmers and immediately climbs out of the pool. He then remembers that his coach told him to stay in the pool to shake hands at the end of the race, so he hops back into the pool. The S&T judge at the finish end of the pool raises a hand. When you approach the judge, they explain that they are disqualifying the swimmer for re-entering the pool. What do you do?

Answer: There is no rule prohibiting the swimmer who has finished their race from re-entering the pool at the end of the race. The swimmer should not be disqualified.

Key Points:

- There is a common misunderstanding that a swimmer cannot re-enter the pool, but there is no NVSL or USA Swimming rule preventing a swimmer from re-entering the pool. As long as the swimmer is not unsportsmanlike, there is no DQ.
- There is a rule pertaining to someone not involved in the race entering the area of the race. This may have caused the misunderstanding.
- There is a rule that applies to relay swimmers re-entering the pool before the end of the race.



Applicable Rules: USA Swimming Rule 102.22.7

Situation: The home Team Rep explains that the top seed 11-12 boys freestyler overslept. He is on his way but may be a little late for his event. The Team Rep asks if you can hold the meet for a few minutes so that the swimmer can swim his event. What do you do?

Answer: NVSL rules state that no event shall be delayed pending the arrival of a swimmer. The Referee should not hold the meet to await the swimmer.

Key Points:

- Discuss options with the Team Rep. The Team Rep can either scratch the swimmer or substitute another swimmer. In the case of a substitution, the swimmer must be a slower swimmer and the original swimmer will not be eligible to swim any later events in the meet.
- The Referee cannot modify the order of events to accommodate either a late arrival or early departure of a swimmer.
- Discuss other possible similar situations and how they can be handled (broken goggles, missing legs in backstroke, bathroom emergency)

Applicable Rules: NVSL Rule 1.i.

Situation: A 13-14 swimmer forgets to remove their “drag suit” and completes the race wearing 2 suits. What do you do?

Answer: A swimmer may only wear one suit, conforming to USA swimming rules for suits during competition. The swimmer should be disqualified.

Key Points:

- The situation can be avoided by reminding the coaches and Team Reps of swimwear requirements prior to the meet and asking the Starter and the S&T judges help look for incorrect swimwear (suits and caps) so that the swimmer can correct the situation before the start of the race.
- USA Swimming allows a swimmer to wear a single set of garments underneath the competition suit for modesty or privacy reasons. Use good judgment about permitting modesty suits.
- WE ARE NOT SUIT INSPECTORS. If the men’s suit does not extend above the navel or below the knees and covers essentials – let them swim. If a women’s suit does not cover the neck, extend past the shoulders nor below the knees and covers essentials, let them swim. Two piece women’s suits are permitted.
- Discuss how caps are handled differently than suits. It is the Referee’s responsibility to identify a cap problem before the start so if the swimmer is allowed to compete in a cap with another team name there is no DQ.
- Watch (pacing devices) and jewelry rules do not apply in NVSL.

Applicable Rules: USA Swimming 102.8, 205.10, NVSL Rule 1.n.

Situation: The home Team Rep indicates that one of the assistant Coaches scheduled to swim the 15 – 18, 50-meter freestyle for the visiting team, although 18 years old, is not a bona fide member of the visiting team’s pool and therefore should not be allowed to compete. What do you do?



Answer: Confirm the facts. If the visiting Team Rep confirms that the swimmer is not an eligible member of the pool, then the swimmer cannot swim. If, however the visiting Team Rep indicates the swimmer is a bona fide pool member and the home Team Rep continues to disagree the Referee should announce the meet is being swum under protest and permit the swimmer to swim.

Key points:

- If the issue can't be resolved quickly, do not hold up the meet.
- The official meet sheet should be annotated as swum under protest.
- The home Team Rep is required to submit a formal written protest to the NVSL President within 3 days.
- Scoring for that event cannot be finalized until the protest is resolved.
- A substitution would not be allowed in this case as substitutions can be made only for sickness, injury or absence.

Applicable Rules: USA 102.23, NVSL Rule 2 & Rule 5

B. Backstroke

(Starter discussion)

Proper starting position is the responsibility of the Starter and Referee before the start. If the Referee or Starter allows an improper starting position and starts the race, there is no disqualification.

Proper backstroke starting position: Heels in contact with water, toes may curl over the gutter, but swimmer may not stand in gutter, hands below knees on "legs", a single thickness of towel can be used (may also be used for forward start). This starting position varies slightly from USA Swimming to accommodate NVSL pool configurations.

Legs: Serve as a substitute for the platform handgrips used by backstrokers when platforms are not available.

- No more than one assistant for "legs."
- Head Coaches, timers or officials may not act as "legs."
- The heels of "legs" may not extend over the vertical plane of the end of the pool.
- There are no specific shoe requirements for legs.
- Think safety – a 9-year-old "legs" may not work for a 17-year-old boy. If it looks like the swimmer or legs is not stable, make adjustments.

Very young backstrokers should not be put in the water too soon (they'll just hang on the side of the pool and tire out their arms).

Situation: You receive your first stroke "DQ" of the meet during the 11-12 boys backstroke event.

The S&T judge at the turn end of the pool raises their hand for what is described as a non-continuous turn. What do you do?

Answer: The Referee should do the following:



- Ask the S&T what happened. Make sure you understand what the judge saw, why it was a DQ and that you are satisfied that the judge was in the correct position to make the call.
- In this case, because the judge said that the infraction was a non-continuous turn you need to get more information. Did the swimmer delay initiating the arm pull? Delay initiating the turn? Take multiple strokes while on breast?
- Ensure the DQ slip is properly and completely written.
- Check event, heat and lane.
- Give original DQ slip to the proper person at the scoring table.
- Give copy to Team Rep.
- Provide **brief** description of DQ to Team Rep.

Key Points:

- Make sure the judge raised his/ her hand. If the hand was not raised, no DQ.
- Encourage judge to write to the rule. In this case, not “non-continuous turn” but “delay in initiating turn.”
- If you are not comfortable with a disqualification, it is OK to disagree with the potential DQ and not confirm (pocket). Explain your rationale to the judge.

Applicable Rules: USA Swimming 102.22, NVSL Rule 13

Situation: Rushing to Clerk of Course for her event, an 11-12 backstroker for the home team stubs her toe and cannot swim her event. The Team Rep proposes to substitute a swimmer who swam backstroke last week and has a faster time for the event. What do you do?

Answer: Substitutions may be made in individual events and relays when necessary because of injury, sickness or absence of competitor. However, for individual events, a substitution may not be made of a faster swimmer for a slower one. The Team Rep cannot substitute the proposed swimmer but can substitute a swimmer with a slower time or one who has no current NVSL time for that event.

Key points:

- Substitutions can be made for sickness, injury or absence.
- A “no time”, a disqualified time, a time from a previous year, a time from a developmental meet or another league is not considered as a faster time under the NVSL rule.
- If the Team Rep substitutes the backstroker with the stubbed toe, then that swimmer cannot swim any other events for that meet (individual and relay events). If the Team Rep scratches the swimmer without substituting the swimmer would be eligible to swim a later event.
- This rule would not apply to the first meet of the NVSL season.

Applicable Rules: NVSL Rule 5

Situation: As you blow the first long whistle to invite the swimmers into the water for the 15-18 boys backstroke the swimmer in lane 4 does a forward flip into the water. What do you do?

Answer: By flipping into the water, the swimmer willfully disobeyed the Starter’s or Referee’s instructions. In this case, the swimmer may be charged for deliberate delay or misconduct and disqualified before the race.



Key points:

- The swimmer's conduct was unsafe and should be dealt with in some fashion.
- In the case of unsportsmanlike conduct, the Referee has discretion to determine the appropriate penalty. The Referee should use discretion and make decisions based on the circumstances. In many cases a warning will be sufficient to end any further unsportsmanlike conduct.
- Intimidation and unsafe actions should never be tolerated

Applicable Rules: USA Swimming Rule 101.1.5, 102.22.3, NVSL Rule 1.c.

C. Breaststroke

(Starter discussion)

Situation: So far the meet score is close. The excitement is increasing, as is the noise during the start. What can you do to manage the noise situation?

Key Points:

- Wait an appropriate short time.
- Ask the Announcer to ask the crowd to be quiet for the start.
- DO NOT ask the Starter to use starting microphone. The Starter should limit their conversation to starting instructions to swimmers.
- Raise your hand and if necessary use the "360-degree whistle." (loud, long whistle as you turn to face and scan the crowd).
- If you use others to help quiet the crowd, make sure you are in control of when they speak and they know your expectations. An Announcer or Marshal that shouts "quiet at the start" in the middle of your start will make swimmers nervous.
- If it is quiet enough for swimmers to respond to you and you feel the background noise will not be distracting, go ahead and start.
- The Referee may prohibit any noise making devices that interfere with the start.

Applicable Rules: USA Swimming 102.11.8

Situation: At the start of the 11-12 boys breaststroke, you clearly see the swimmer in lane 2 take 2 butterfly kicks after initiating the arm pull but prior to the breast stroke kick. You look to see if the S&T judge's hand goes up. It does not. What do you do?

Answer: Observe whether or not the judge was in proper position for the call. Determine if the judge was looking at another lane at the time or if they were just not sure of what they saw. If you feel that it is appropriate to discretely and politely coach the judge on position and what to look for, have a brief discussion between events. The Referee should not make the call.

Key Points:

- Referees should rarely make calls if the deck is properly managed.
- Although the Referee has the right to make a call that he/ she personally sees, making the call in this case will make the pool unbalanced. You cannot judge all lanes equally from the starting position.



- You are in a position to see things that the judges cannot. Judges are watching 3 lanes from the end and are dealing with splash and glare.
- Your goal is to provide a fair competition and a balanced deck, not to “catch every swimmer.”
- You can help judges learn from their experiences through positive coaching.
- Remember that officials are volunteers and possibly your neighbor. Coach in a way that makes them look forward to working with you again.

Situation: The visiting Team Rep explains to the Referee that one of their 15-18 girls had her wisdom teeth removed two days earlier. The swimmer is afraid that starting from the deck might cause her to tear her stitches. The Team Rep asks if the swimmer can start from the water. What do you do?

Answer: Any swimmer can be allowed to start from in the water. The swimmer must have one hand in contact with the wall or starting platform.

Key points:

- NVSL and USA rules permit in water starts so this is not an accommodation.
- This is a temporary medical condition, not a permanent disability.
- Describe the proper in-water starting position.
- Discuss how an in-water relay exchange differs from an in-water start.

Applicable Rules: USA 101.1.2A, USA 101.7.4G, NVSL Rule 12 (3)

D. Butterfly

(Starter discussion)

Situation: An instant before the starting horn sounds for the start of the 11-12 girls’ butterfly, a car alarm sounds in the parking lot. The swimmers in lanes 1, 2, & 4 seem unaffected but the swimmer in lane 6 starts at the sound of the car horn, the swimmer in lane 3 stands and looks at the Starter then dives in and the swimmer in lane 5 does not start. What do you do?

Answer: The car alarm affected the fair start. The Referee should tell the Starter to recall the race. If the Starter or Referee fail to recall the race and some swimmers complete their swim, those swimmers may keep their times. If the race is not recalled, offer all swimmers a re-swim but inform them that the time of the re-swim will be their official time.

Key points:

- All swimmers should be offered the re-swim. If the swimmers accept the re-swim, their second swim is their official time.
- Give recovery time to the swimmers who completed the event before conducting the re-swim.
- If it appears that the start was not fair, the Referee (or Starter) should recall the race.
- As the Starter, make sure you test the recall signal at least once during the season so you remember how to recall a race when necessary.

Applicable Rules: USA Swimming 102.22.9



Situation: Just before the start of the 15-18 boys butterfly, the home Team Rep complains that the visiting swimmer in lane 2 has already swum freestyle and backstroke and should not be allowed to swim butterfly. The visiting Team Rep says that they did in fact make that mistake and the swimmer has already swum 2 events. The visiting Team Rep proposes to substitute a swimmer who has not swum butterfly yet this year. What do you do?

Answer: Swimmers may only swim 2 individual events so the initial 15-18 swimmer is not eligible to swim butterfly and must be scratched. A substitution is not permitted in this case.

Key Points:

- If the error is discovered after the swimmer races, the swimmer should be disqualified for the ineligible swim (the last individual swim), the Team Rep does not get to choose which event the swimmer would have been scratched from.
- The swimmer would still be eligible to swim relays, as the swimmer has not exceeded the allowable number of relay events.

Applicable Rules: NVSL Rule 4, NVSL Rule 5

E. Relay Break (10 min)

During the break before relays you should:

- Open the pool for a short warm up period. Make sure that Marshals are supervising the pool and that the Announcer makes the appropriate announcements and manages the time.
- Double check that relay take off slips are ready for distribution (8 relay take off judges, 12 events).
- Conduct Relay take off briefing. **Use the briefing card from the NVSL website.**
 - Dual confirmation, but no discussion between judges.
 - Make sure you are in position to see a touch under the coping.
 - Observe feet then look at touch.
 - Do not raise hand.
 - Always write something – **X** if early take off, **O** if clean exchange.
 - Any specific information the judges need to know (unofficial relays, pool configuration, etc.).
 - Determine how you will collect slips (you may want to assign someone at each end to collect slips).
 - Assign lane and side judges, explaining the difference in the positions and where each judge should stand. Make sure that each lane has equal coverage (similar position of judges).
- Have Announcer recall officials and timers 3 minutes before start of relays.
- Make sure that Clerk of Course has swimmers ready.

F. Relays

Situation: Just before the relay events, the home team discovers that one of its 13-14 boys is missing so they can't swim the event. The Team Rep scratches the 13-14 relay and moves the fastest 13-14 swimmer to the 15-18 event, substituting for a slower swimmer. Both Team Reps come to you,



explain what was done and state that they both agreed to the substitution so that the 13-14 swimmer gets a chance to swim. What do you do?

Answer: A swimmer may not be moved from one event to another under any circumstance. The 15-18 relay is a separate event from the 13-14 relay. If the team swims with the substitute 13-14 swimmer the team should be disqualified.

Key Points:

- It is important to understand the scratch and substitution rules.
- For individual events a faster swimmer can't be substituted for a slower swimmer. This does not apply in the case of relays.
- Team Reps cannot change the substitution rules by agreement.
- You may not be aware of a substitution error until reviewing the meet results. At that point you will need to confirm the substitution error, disqualify the improper swimmer and adjust the results.

Applicable Rules: NVSL Rule 5

Situation: During the boys 8 and under freestyle 100-yard relay, the swimmers are positioned at both ends of the pool with swimmers 1 & 3 at the start end and swimmers 2 & 4 positioned at the turn end. At the sound of the starting signal, swimmers 1 & 2 of the visiting team enter the pool from both ends. What do you do?

Answer: Rule 101.7.3C states a swimmer other than the first swimmer shall not start until his/her team member has completed his leg. This rule would apply in this case, as the second swimmer entered the pool while the first swimmer was swimming his leg. A stroke and turn judge should make this call and raise a hand to indicate a possible disqualification. It is likely that the S&T judges will not recognize this as their jurisdiction and not indicate the disqualification. If no judge raises a hand to indicate a possible disqualification, the Referee should raise a hand to indicate the possible disqualification and disqualify swimmer 2.

Key Points:

- There are 2 rules that apply here. Rule 101.7.3C states a swimmer other than the first swimmer shall not start until his/her team member has completed his leg (S&T jurisdiction). Rule 101.7.3F states a swimmer whose feet has lost touch with the starting platform (deck) before his/her teammate has touched the wall shall be disqualified (RTO judge jurisdiction). The situation can lead to confusion among the S&T judges and the RTO judges as to who is responsible for the call. The call could be correctly made by either an S&T or a relay take off judge.
- Try to avoid this situation in the first place by being proactive. Have Clerk of Course remind younger swimmers of the order of the swim. The Referee might even want to walk to the turn end of the pool before the race to remind the second swimmers to wait for the first leg to finish.
- This may be one of those rare times where confusion over jurisdiction means that no judge makes the call. In this case it is appropriate for the Referee to raise his hand and make the call if no other judge does.

Applicable Rules: USA Rule 101.7.3F and Rule 101.7.3C



Situation: During the girls 8 & under 100 Meter Freestyle Relay the first swimmer on the home team finishes her leg but remains in the pool. As the third swimmer from the home team is halfway down the pool on her leg, a turn end S&T judge notices the first swimmer is still in the pool. The judge reaches down and lifts the first swimmer from the pool before the third swimmer completes her leg. During the commotion, the fourth swimmer from the visiting team, which had a lead in the race, begins her leg. The visiting team finishes first in the race, but the relay take off Judges confirm that the fourth swimmer from the visiting team left early. What do you do?

Answer: The judge's actions may have interfered with the race, causing the early take off. Before disqualifying the visiting team, the Referee should investigate to determine if the judge's actions or the actions of any of the officials caused the early take off. If the Referee determines that the officials' actions did not cause the early take off, the visiting team should be disqualified. If the Referee determines that an official's actions caused the early take off, then the visiting team should not be disqualified in spite of the dual confirmed early take off.

Key Points:

- Officials (Referee, Starter, S&T judges, RTO, or timers) should not interfere with a race.
- Officials should not pull swimmers from the pool.
- In the case of a swimmer in distress, allow the lifeguard to assist the swimmer.
- If the Referee believes that an official or equipment interfered with a swimmer's performance the Referee can offer a re-swim. The Referee should not require a re-swim to avoid or negate a valid disqualification.
- The intent of the NVSL and USA rule is to prevent interference or unsportsmanlike conduct. In the case of a swimmer who is having difficulty exiting the pool, the Referee can ask the swimmer to move to an empty lane.

Applicable Rules: NVSL Rule 12.f, USA Swimming Rule 101.7.3E, 102.22.9

Situation: During the 9-10 boys relay, the visiting team finishes first, but swimmer 2 gets so excited that he forgets himself and jumps into the pool and swims another length before the home team completes their final leg of the relay. What do you do?

Answer: Any relay team member shall be disqualified if a team member other than the swimmer designated to swim that leg enters the pool in the area where the race is conducted before all swimmers of all teams have finished the race. The visiting team should be disqualified.

Key Points:

- To avoid this situation, encourage swimmers to step back from the edge of the pool when they finish their leg of the race.
- The rule applies until all swimmers of all teams have completed their race. Therefore, if a swimmer enters the pool after the last swimmer touches, the race has completed and there is no penalty.

Applicable Rules: USA Swimming Rule 101.7.3

Situation: The 11-12 girls relay finish is very close. The timecards indicate that the home team had the fastest time. A seasoned stroke and turn judge (from the visiting team) sees the times as they are posted and comes to you. The judge states that they were watching the finish touch. Although



the race was extremely close, the judge is certain that the visiting team touched first. What do you do?

Answer: Order of finish is determined by properly recorded official watch times. Barring an unusual and rare circumstance, the timecards should determine the order of finish. The home team's first place stands.

Key points:

- NVSL does not use finish judges.
- There are many close races in NVSL. Every finish in a meet will not receive the same scrutiny of placement judging. To be fair to all swimmers, watch times should be used to determine order of finish.
- NVSL uses 3 watches and the method of using the middle watch time, the double or triple watch time, or the average of 2 watch times if one watch time is not properly recorded (missed start or stop). No adjustment to watch times should be made. Beyond the methods above, eliminating a watch time should only be done by the Referee if there is clear evidence that the time was not properly recorded, e.g. the timer states that they knew they started/ stopped the watch early/ late, or the watch clearly malfunctioned. In this rare circumstance, the invalid watch time would be thrown out and the order of finish would be determined by the remaining watch times.

Applicable Rules: NVSL Rule 11.g, NVSL Rule 10.e.

REMEMBER TO THANK VOLUNTEERS BEFORE THE MEET IS OVER

VIII. After the Meet/ Results

Note the finish time on the Referee program. Offer to de-brief judges and the Starter. Answer questions they might have and discuss situations encountered.

Review the results. Sign the computer-generated copy. What to look for:

- Final score.
- Obvious administrative errors.
- DQs noted on meet sheet are all reflected in the results and properly recorded.
- NVSL records properly recorded (if applicable).
- No shows.
- Substitutions.

IX. Special Situations

Situation: During the meet, the Team Rep approaches the Referee. The Team Rep is very unhappy with a particular call and insists on filing a protest. What do you do?

Answer: Accept the protest for a stroke and turn call or false start and make a final ruling based on all of the facts you have before you. **Remind the Team Rep that technical protests can only be made to the Referee who makes the final determination, and that issues on technical calls are not protestable to the league.**



Key points:

- Protests must be made by the Team Representative.
- Protests regarding turns, strokes and other technical rules must be made to the Referee within 30 minutes of the conclusion of the last event.
- Protests of administrative and non-technical rules are made to President NVSL, in writing (not electronically), within 3 days of the meet.
- Scoring for the protested event is not finalized until the protest is resolved.
- The swimmer gets the benefit of the doubt. If you feel there is doubt about a call, don't be afraid to change the ruling.

Applicable Rules: USA Swimming 102.23, NVSL Rule 14

Situation: At the end of the 13-14 girls breaststroke you hand a disqualification slip to the home Team Rep for a one handed touch at the turn end of the pool. The Team Rep objects to the disqualification and says that the girl's father was videotaping the race and has a video that clearly shows that the swimmer touched with both hands. What do you do?

Answer: NVSL does not use video replay in any capacity. You explain to the Team Rep that you cannot use the video in the ruling. If you feel that the stroke and turn judge was in proper position to make the call and properly described what the judge saw and why it was a disqualification, the call stands.

Key Points:

- NVSL does not use video replay under any circumstances.
- USA Swimming only uses underwater video to judge events under limited and very specific circumstances, using judges with that specific jurisdiction.
- What about the other races that day where dad was not videoing the race? All competitors must be judged under the same circumstances to create a fair competition.
- You do not need to see the disqualification for it to stand. If the judge is in position and can adequately explain the infraction, then the disqualification can stand.

Applicable Rules: USA Swimming Rule 102.22.14

Situation: A rare Saturday morning thunder storm kicks up in the middle of the relay events. After ½ hour delay, weather maps indicate several more hours of storm activity. The Team Reps come to you proposing to cancel the rest of the meet. They have discussed possible times to schedule the remainder of the meet but can't identify a time that is acceptable to both teams. Since the total points remaining in the meet will not impact the outcome of the meet, the Team Reps have agreed to simply split the remaining relay points to finalize the score. What do you do?

Answer: The Team Reps, in consultation with the Division Coordinator, may agree to schedule to resume the meet, or terminate the meet at the last completed event. No points will be awarded for the events that are not swum. The final score should not include points for the canceled events.

Key points:

- The time and start of a rescheduled meet or resuming an interrupted meet can be determined by mutual consent of the Team Reps.



- The meet should be held at the scheduled pool unless there are unusual circumstances. Moving the meet to another pool must be approved by the division coordinator.
- Points are only awarded for events that are swum. The exception to this is the NVSL All Star Meet when the meet cannot be held on the date scheduled.

Applicable Rules: NVSL Rule 1.f & g, Rule 15.d,

Situation: At the Divisional Championship Meet, the division coordinator approaches you and states, “This meet does not affect division standing and should really be an opportunity for the swimmers to have fun and possibly win a plaque. I would like for you to only make calls if they are very obvious to everyone. I don’t want a lot of DQ’s slowing down the meet.”

Answer: Politely explain to the division coordinator that NVSL expects divisional championships to be conducted using USA Swimming and NVSL rules. Judges always give the benefit of the doubt to the swimmer but to give all swimmers a fair competition, properly observed DQ’s will be recorded.

Key Points:

- Divisional Championships are the seeding meet for NVSL All Stars. You must be fair to all of the swimmers at your meet and you must be fair to all of the swimmers in other divisions swimming that day.
- You are not being fair to a swimmer or doing them a favor if they are allowed to make the same mistake all season, make the mistake at divisional championships, then get disqualified for that mistake at All Stars.
- Benefit of the doubt goes to the swimmer.

Applicable Rules: NVSL 1.d, 13

