

USA Swimming Situation Resolutions – Disability Swimmers

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

1. There are no provisions in the USA Swimming rulebook for swimmers with a disability. True or False?

Recommended Resolution: False. *USA Swimming Rules & Regulations* state the Referee "may modify any rule for a competitive swimmer who has a disability. Such modification shall be in accordance with Article 105 of this rulebook."

Applicable Rules: 102.13.8, part 105.

2. What are the major categories of disabilities as described in USA Swimming rules?

Recommended Resolution: There are four major categories of disabilities:

- Blind and Visually Impaired
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- Mentally Impaired
- Physical Disabilities

Applicable Rules: part 105.

3. LSCs cannot make special rules for swimmers with a disability. True or False?

Recommended Resolution: False. Section 202.2.13 states: "LSC's may develop special administrative standards and conditions to encourage athletes with disabilities to participate in their meets. Such conditions shall be included in the meet information."

Applicable Rules: 202.2.13

4. A swimmer with a disability wishes to swim in a USA Swimming meet but does not have the qualifying time for that meet. Is there anything that can be done to permit the athlete to participate?

Recommended Resolution: The LSC can do the following:

- The meet time standards could be waived for swimmers with a disability.
- Special time standards, based on a percentage of the normal standards, could be established.

Applicable Rules: 202.2.13

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5. The coach of a blind swimmer asks whether he can tap a blind swimmer on the heel of her foot to signal a relay exchange. Is this legal?

Recommended Resolution: Yes. The rulebook states that “A physical touch may be required to signal the relay swimmer when his/her teammate has touched the wall. The specific method may be tailored to the swimmer’s preference so long as it does not aid the swimmer’s take-off or interfere with the timing.”

Applicable Rules: 105.2.3

6. The coach of a swimmer with a hand amputation asks permission for the swimmer to use a hand paddle on the affected limb during races. Should this be allowed?

Recommended Resolution: No. Rule 102.10.10 states: "No swimmer is permitted to wear or use any device or substance to help his/her speed or buoyancy during a race." Rule 105.5.2 last sentence states: "No floatation devices should be permitted".

Applicable Rules: 102.10.10, 105.5.2

7. A dwarf swimmer, whose arms cannot reach above her head, finishes a breaststroke event with her head. Should she be disqualified for not making a simultaneous two-hand touch?

Recommended Resolution: No. Rule 105.5.3 states: "...Swimmers with no arms or with upper limbs too short to stretch above the head may touch the wall with any part of the upper body.

Applicable Rules: 105.5.3

8. A swimmer who has autism competes in a breaststroke event. His feet do not "toe-out" during any part of the kick. Should he be disqualified?

Recommended Resolution: Yes. Autism is a cognitive disability (S14). Rule 105.4 for the Mentally Impaired swimmer states, in part: "No other specific rule modifications are required other than patience and clarity in communicating instructions.

Applicable Rules: 105.4

9. The coach of a deaf swimmer requests that she be seeded in an outside lane near the starter's strobe light. Should this request be granted?

Recommended Resolution: Yes. Rule 105.3 states: "The Referee may reassign lanes within the swimmer's heat, i.e., exchanging one lane for another, so that the strobe light or Starter's arm signal can more readily be seen by the deaf or hard of hearing swimmer."

Applicable Rules: 105.3, 105.1.2B(2)(2)

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10. A coach asks permission to assist a swimmer with cerebral palsy at the start of his races. The swimmer has unsure standing balance and the coach assists by standing behind the swimmer and holding the swimmer's hips until the starting signal is given. Should the Referee allow this?

Recommended Resolution: Yes. Rule 105.5.1C states that swimmers with physical disabilities "may need assistance from on the deck or from in the water to maintain a starting position."

Applicable Rules: 105.5.1C

11. A parent calls to ask about hooking-up an extra portable strobe light to the starting system to accommodate his deaf swimmer. The parent owns the extra strobe and is willing to bring it to the meet. Is this permissible?

Recommended Resolution: Rule 105.3.2 specifies that "The Starter shall advise the swimmers about the location of the strobe light and the light shall be located where the swimmers can clearly see it for the start. For backstroke starts, the light should be positioned so that the swimmers don't have to turn their heads to look backwards." If the host club has an extra strobe(s) so that all swimmers can see the light, particularly for the backstroke start, the parent's strobe may not be needed. Otherwise, addition of this extra strobe might be of benefit for all swimmers and should be allowed.

Applicable Rules: 105.3.2, 103.15

12. It is the Referee's responsibility to ascertain a swimmer's disability and provide any needed equipment. True or False?

Recommended Resolution: False. Rule 105.1.2A states the "The athlete (or the athlete's coach) is responsible for notifying the Referee, prior to the competition, of any disability of the athlete. The swimmer/coach shall provide any assistant(s) or equipment (tappers, deck mats, etc.) if required.

Applicable Rules: 105.1.2A

13. Starters must always give arm signals when starting a heat, which includes deaf or hard of hearing swimmers. True or False?

Recommended Resolution: False. Rule 105.3.1 states "Deaf and hard of hearing swimmers require a visual starting signal, i.e., a strobe light and/or Starter's arm signals." It should be left to the swimmer's preference as to whether arm signals are wanted or whether a strobe light is sufficient.

Applicable Rules: 105.3.1

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14. The parents of a swimmer who uses a wheelchair contact the Meet Director and LSC Board of Directors to insist that a scheduled meet be moved from an inaccessible facility to one with an elevator and hydraulic pool lift. Does the law require this request be approved?

Recommended Resolution: No. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that places of exercise must provide "reasonable accommodations" for "qualified individuals" with a disability that do not result in "undue hardship" on the place of exercise. Requiring a host to move their meet to another facility is not a "reasonable accommodation".

Applicable Rules: Americans with Disabilities Act

15. The parent of a deaf swimmer asks that an American Sign Language interpreter be provided during every meet session when the swimmer is competing. Would this be required? What alternatives would there be?

Recommended Resolution: No. See answer to the previous question. Hiring a full-time interpreter would be an "undue hardship" for small swim clubs that are funded by dues and fund-raising activities. As an alternate, a family member could be allowed on deck to sign for the swimmer.

Applicable Rules: Americans with Disabilities Act

16. Swimmers with a disability must present written proof of that disability to the Referee. True or False?

Recommended Resolution: False. Article 105 of the Rulebook does not require written proof of a disability. Since a disability is defined in Article 105 as "a permanent physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities", it is usually evident.

Applicable Rules: part 105