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SWIMMING ADDENDUM TO THE RULES THAT GOVERN YMCA COMPETITIVE SPORTS

November 2025

YMCA of the USA's Rules That Govern YMCA Competitive Sports are guidelines that apply to all competitive sports in the YMCA and not specifically for swimming. This addendum provides additional explanation of the rules as applied to YMCA Swimming. Coaches, athletes, parents, YMCA supervisors, and local Y leaders are responsible for knowing and abiding by the Rules That Govern (hereinafter "RTG") as well as this Addendum.

SWIMMER ELIGIBILITY

YMCA Membership

A member of a YMCA swim team must have a **full privilege YMCA membership** that entitles him or her to the same activities and services as other full-privilege YMCA members, not special limited-access memberships available only to swim team members (RTG Rule I). This membership requirement promotes the development of supportive relationships and a sense of belonging within a local YMCA community where critical learning and development occurs.

A swimmer must be a member in good standing of his/her YMCA for **30 days** prior to the first day of a YMCA meet in which he/she competes. The swimmer must be a member in good standing of his/her YMCA for **90 days** prior to the first day of a district, regional, state, or national championship meet in which he/she competes (RTG Rule IV Sec.2). The membership status must be valid through the end of the competition.

Nationwide/Reciprocal Y Membership and Swim Teams

Many YMCAs participate in *Nationwide YMCA Membership* or permit access to their facilities based on an individual's membership at another YMCA unit, branch, or association. This typically grants access to facilities and not programs.

In YMCA competitive sports programs, including swimming, participants must maintain a **full privilege membership at the YMCA they represent in competition**. This is their "home" or "primary" YMCA, to which their YMCA membership and swim team membership dues are paid.

Dual Representation (RTG Rule IV Sec.4)

RTG Rule I defines dual representation as occurring when "an athlete represents more than one team during the current season in a particular sport." It is a violation of the dual representation rule for a swimmer to represent a YMCA team and a separate USA Swimming team during the current season.

A YMCA swimmer may represent his/her interscholastic institution (e.g., high school) in closed interscholastic competition (where only scholastic teams compete), which is not considered dual representation (RTG Rule IV Sec. 4a).

When an interscholastic institution, usually a prep or boarding school, offers a swimming program which also competes in open (e.g., USA Swimming) competition, a YMCA swimmer may not represent the school in open competition and still be in compliance with the permissible dual representation rule. He or she may compete in the open competition but must be unattached.

A YMCA swimmer may represent a local summer league team that is different than his/her YMCA team in closed league competition (where only members of the summer league compete) (RTG Rule IV Sec. 4a).

When a YMCA team is not also registered with USA Swimming, a member of that YMCA team may participate in USA Swimming competitions as an *Unattached* swimmer. A member of a YMCA team may practice with a separate USA Swimming club if permitted by the YMCA team's coach/director, but he/she needs to be aware of the YMCA dual representation and transfer rules. YMCA leagues, states, and regions have the right to further restrict such dual participation.

A swimmer may represent only his/her YMCA in closed or open competition for a period of at least 90 days prior to the first day of any YMCA championship meet. Exceptions are noted above for closed interscholastic competition and local summer league competition.

Transfers

YMCA Team to YMCA Team

Swimmers who wish to change their membership from one YMCA to another may do so through **Transfer by Consent** (RTG Rule IV Sec.3). A swimmer may transfer from one YMCA team to another YMCA team and be eligible to compete for his/her new YMCA team immediately upon completion of the Transfer by Consent document. The form is signed by the CEO or Executive Director of the YMCA from which the swimmer is transferring and by the swimmer's parent or legal guardian. The membership transfer must be completed BEFORE the individual competes for the new association or branch. The Transfer by Consent document may be found at the end of the RTG.

While the swimmer may represent the new YMCA immediately upon completion of the Transfer by Consent, the swimmer must still be a full privilege member of a YMCA—any YMCA—for 30 days prior to the first day competing in a YMCA meet and be a full privilege member of a YMCA—any YMCA—for at least 90 days prior to the first day of a YMCA championship meet in which they compete.

Non-YMCA Team to YMCA Team

A swimmer who wishes to transfer from a non-YMCA team (e.g., USA Swimming team) to a YMCA team during the current season must observe the YMCA membership rules as stated in the RTG. To be eligible to compete in any YMCA championship meet, including a YMCA National Championship Meet, a swimmer may not have represented any organization other than his/her YMCA team (with the exception of closed interscholastic competition or closed summer league competition) for at least 90 days prior to the first day of the YMCA championship meet.

YMCA Team to Non-YMCA Team

A swimmer may transfer from a YMCA team to a non-YMCA team at any time, but once he or she represents that non-YMCA team in competition, the YMCA 90-day representation rule is in effect.

YMCA National Championship Swimmer Competition Category

At the YMCA National Championship meets, swimmers compete according to their biological sex assigned at birth. Parents and adult athletes attest to this on their signed attestation that is required for competition.

Amateur Status

Applying the definition of an amateur (RTG Rule I), an individual may not have represented a college, university, or other post-high school institution in any competition, including both varsity and club, and may not have accepted pay or compensation for competing as a swimmer.

Unattached Swimmers

There is no "unattached" designation in YMCA Swimming. All swimmers must compete as full members of a YMCA team and, thus, satisfy the YMCA membership requirements and be covered under that YMCA's insurance. See also the section titled *YMCA Without a Swim Team*.

YMCA Meet Participation

For an athlete to be eligible to compete in sanctioned YMCA championship competitions, he or she must have competed in a minimum number of closed inter-association YMCA meets during the current season. That number is determined by the league, region, or other entity sponsoring the championship meet. For YMCA National Championship Meets, an athlete must have competed in three closed inter-association YMCA meets plus one sanctioned YMCA championship meet since Sept. 1 of the current season.

To compete is defined as swimming in at least one meet event to completion (without taking a declared false start). Time trial meets do not satisfy this YMCA meet participation requirement.

Eligibility Waivers

According to RTG Rule IX, a coach may request a waiver on behalf of a swimmer for one or more meet eligibility requirements. The request is submitted in writing to the Meet Committee and Meet Director as early as possible, but no less than one week prior to the meet entry deadline. The Meet Committee and Meet Director will discuss the circumstances and make a determination expeditiously. For the YMCA National Championship Meets, waiver requests are sent to the National Eligibility Committee Chairperson using the [electronic waiver request form](#). The earlier the request is submitted, the more the committee can work with the team to meet minimum requirements for a waiver.

With all waiver requests, the coach requesting the waiver for his/her athlete(s) should demonstrate that dedicated good faith efforts have been made by the coach, athlete, parents, and team to meet the stated eligibility requirements for the meet.

Adult (18 and Older) Athlete Requirement

In compliance with the U.S. Center for SafeSport's standards, YMCA athletes (aged 18 and older) complete Athlete Protection Training every 12 months. Options include:

- [USA Swimming Athlete Protection Training](#) – Required for all athletes aged 18 and older who are members of USA Swimming

- [U.S. Center for SafeSport](#) – SafeSport® Trained Series course
- [Praesidium](#) – YUSA Competitive Sports Learning Path (includes Athlete Protection Part I and Part II and Duty to Report: Mandated Reporter)

Each YMCA is responsible for maintaining records of this training requirement and providing them for entry in any YMCA sanctioned meet, including YMCA National Championship Meets.

COACH ELIGIBILITY

Each YMCA is responsible for hiring or selecting the coaches who represent that YMCA and for ensuring that each coach

- clears a background screening every two years,
- maintains the certifications outlined for YMCA coaches below,
- completes the annual coach registration, and
- is not on a banned, suspended, or disciplined list for the U.S. Center for Safe Sport or USA Swimming

Safety Certifications

In the interest of maintaining the highest level of safety, the YMCA of the USA (Y-USA) standard for **all** coaches who work with YMCA swimmers is to maintain current certification in the following areas (*Note: Instructor certifications and online-only CPR and First Aid courses are not acceptable.*).

The [complete list](#) of providers and acceptable CPR, First Aid, and Lifeguard courses is found on the [YMCA Swimming and Diving website](#) and on the Aquatics community on Link.

1. Basic Life Support (Professional Rescuer CPR)

Note: Following the recommendation of the YMCA Medical Advisory Board, the YMCA requires annual recertification of CPR, regardless of the certification period indicated by the organization issuing the certificate.

2. First Aid

YMCA swimming coaches must maintain a certification in basic-level First Aid. It is recommended that the First Aid training includes both adult and pediatric components. The First Aid course must be completed in person with skills verification. Online certifications are not accepted.

3. Safety Training for Swim Coaches

There are two parts of the Safety Training for Swim Coaches certification: the online course content and the in-water skills. Both must be completed for certification.

- Go to www.redcross.org/takeaclass to access the *Safety Training for Swim Coaches Online Content*.
- Using the YMCA In-Water Skills Checklist, complete the skills check with a certified lifeguard instructor.
- If a coach has an approved ([see list](#)) and valid lifeguard or YMCA Aquatic Safety Assistant certification, that certification takes the place of the In-water Skills Checklist.

4. Principles of YMCA Swimming and Diving

- This course is offered online through the Learning and Career Development Center (LCDC) on Link (lcdc.yexchange.org). There is an online portion and a workbook with planning activities as well as a series of meetings with YMCA leaders. A certificate is issued when the online portion is complete. The completed workbook portion of the course is then uploaded to the YMCA swim coach registration site for review by the regional representative.

5. Child/Athlete Protection Training

All coaches annually complete an approved child protection training course that contains sexual abuse prevention and mandated reporter components. See the [Certification Requirements for YMCA Swim Coaches](#) document on Link or the YMCA Swimming and Diving website for approved providers and courses.

Concussion Awareness

Y-USA encourages all coaches to complete concussion awareness training. Some states mandate training for youth sports, including swimming. **Check with your state for requirements.** For YMCA National Championship competition, all parents and athletes are required to read and sign the Concussion Awareness Form as part of their attestation during the meet entry process. In addition, there is a specific protocol in effect during the meet when any head injury occurs. More information may be found on the [Sports National Championship Concussion Memo](#) on the [YMCA Swimming and Diving website](#).

Annual YMCA Team and Coach Registration

Each year, YMCA teams and coaches complete an online YMCA Swimming registration. This process creates an important communication and data collection link between the national, regional, and local levels of YMCA Swimming. The registration portal is accessed through the regional YMCA websites or the [YMCA Swimming and Diving website](#).

Deadlines: December 1 (Short Course Season); July 1 (Long Course Season)

Certifications will not be verified, and the coach's deck passes will not be activated after these dates.

Team Registration

- \$50, payable to YMCA of the USA
- Required for team participation in any YMCA sanctioned (championship or invitational) meet

Coach Registration

- Applies to all YMCA coaches
- Free between Sept. 1 and Dec. 1 and between April 3 and June 1
- Requires \$100 fee between Dec. 2 and April 2 and between June 2 and Aug. 1
- Upload electronic copies of current certifications, indicated above, in the designated fields
- Once registered and approved, the coach's YMCA deck pass is available through SportsEngine's free SportsEngine Motion app (this is available to all coaches, not only teams that are SportsEngine customers)
- To ensure compliance with YMCA coach eligibility standards, Meet Directors for YMCA sanctioned meets will check coach registrations and certifications either through a list provided by the regional representative or by viewing each coach's mobile deck pass. Only registered coaches with current certifications are permitted on deck.

ELIGIBILITY OF ASSOCIATIONS AND TEAMS

Representation of YMCA Associations and Branches

As defined in RTG Rule II, an association is certified by the Board of Directors of the National Council of YMCAs, has an association branch or unit number, and is eligible for separate listing in the YMCA Directory. Each chartered branch, department, or center that is part of a Metropolitan Association has its own association number, as does the Metropolitan Association.

A Metropolitan Association must decide whether to operate a competitive swimming program that represents the association as a whole or to have individual teams at its branches.

A YMCA must be in good standing with Y-USA to have its swim team participate in YMCA swimming competition. An association that is not in good standing but has been working cooperatively with Certification and Membership Qualifications (CMQ) on a strategic engagement plan may be considered for formal competition after submitting an eligibility waiver to the VP of CMQ.

A YMCA team may not represent a branch (having one association number) during part of the season and the association (that has a different association number than the branch) as a whole during another. Likewise, multiple YMCA branch teams may not compete as one association team in USA Swimming meets but separate into multiple teams during YMCA meets.

Team Name

A YMCA team must compete under one name—its YMCA branch or association name—and its association number. This applies to closed YMCA competition as well as USA Swimming competition.

USA Swimming Team and YMCA Name

Each YMCA team may hold only one USA Swimming team membership. A YMCA team may not be part of more than one USA Swimming team membership (and cannot be comprised of swimmers of more than one USA Swimming team).

YMCA teams must register with USA Swimming using their official YMCA name as listed in the national YMCA directory and have that name on their USA Swimming Certificate of Insurance.

A YMCA team may not have two separate entities within one team (e.g., a YMCA component and a USA Swimming component) where only those who compete in YMCA meets are YMCA members. All members of a team registered as a YMCA team must be members of that YMCA.

A YMCA team may not compete under one name in YMCA competition and a different name in USA Swimming competition.

YMCA Without a Swim Team

If an association does not sponsor a swimming team, an eligible athlete from that association may participate in the National Championship Meet representing his/her own YMCA, provided the entry is approved by the regional representative in that region and by the National Championship Meet Eligibility Committee (RTG Rule IV). The athlete should also be under the supervision of a certified YMCA coach from another YMCA. Leagues, districts, states, and regions are encouraged to afford the same privileges.

Service Areas

Although individuals are free to become members and/or participate in the programs of any YMCA of their choosing, each YMCA is chartered by Y-USA to operate in a designated service area. YMCAs cannot operate programs within the service area of another YMCA without that YMCA's permission or permission from Y-USA. Therefore, a swim team that is affiliated with one YMCA cannot practice or conduct meets in the service area of another YMCA without that YMCA's permission or permission from Y-USA.

COMPETITION

Y-USA views competition as a means by which achievement, relationships, and belonging are emphasized and celebrated and connected communities are created. Healthy competition promotes a dedicated effort to realize one's potential with dignity, integrity, and sportsmanship. At all levels, YMCA competitions promote this healthy competition and not a "winning at all costs" attitude. The structure of YMCA competition progresses from local to league, regional, and national levels, creating an ever-expanding community in which youth build relationships, develop a sense of belonging, and achieve their full potential.

Closed YMCA Competition

Closed YMCA competition refers to competition in which only YMCA teams and swimmers may compete.

Current Season

The current season in YMCA Swimming is Sept. 1-Aug. 31.

Age

For the purpose of recognizing YMCA National Championship qualifying times, National YMCA Records, and YMCA Top 16 times, a swimmer's age is determined by his or her age on the first day of competition. Following this standard at all levels ensures consistency for athletes, teams, and coaches.

Technical Rules

YMCA swimming competition uses the USA Swimming technical rules. For times to be eligible for the YMCA National Championship Meets, YMCA Top 16, and YMCA National Records, they must be achieved in meets that are conducted using these rules.

Safety Guidelines

Y-USA has established the following recommended guidelines for the conduct of all YMCA practices and competitions:

- Per the YMCA Child Abuse Prevention and Aquatic Safety Membership Qualification, **certified lifeguards are on duty at all times and have the sole responsibility of guarding pool(s)**. Coaches who hold lifeguard certification are not to be considered on-duty lifeguards while actively coaching.
- **Pool depth is at least five feet** at any end of the pool where racing dives will be performed. If the pool water depth at the starting end of the pool is less than the prescribed five feet, all swimmers must start their races in the water.
- **Pool depth is at least nine feet** at any end of the pool where diving instruction will be given.
- Starting blocks are used only under the **direct supervision of a certified coach**.
- During an **electrical storm**, Y-USA recommends suspending practices and clearing the pool deck. This applies to indoor and outdoor pools. The pool may be re-opened 30 minutes after the last thunder is heard or lightning is last seen. At the YMCA National Championship Meets, if the venue is grounded, bonded, and has supplied a legal certificate verifying such, the venue's protocol may be followed.
- **Extended breath holding** and any hyperventilation are both prohibited.
- **Changing into or out of swimsuits** other than in locker rooms or other designated areas is not appropriate and is prohibited.
- The **use of cell phones or other devices** with photo or video capability is prohibited in locker rooms, restrooms, and other changing areas.

- **Operation of a drone**, or any other flying apparatus, is prohibited over the venue (pools, athlete/coach areas, spectator areas, and open-ceiling locker rooms) any time athletes, coaches' officials, and/or spectators are present.

These guidelines are subject to current local, state, and federal laws and ordinances. In the event of a conflict between such laws and ordinances and these guidelines, follow the more stringent of the two. In addition, when there is a difference in rules related to safety in competition, the Y team should first follow the YMCA regulations, and then the most conservative rules.

Find YMCA aquatics safety resources that help guide the formulation of local YMCA policies and procedures in the [YMCA Aquatic Safety Guidelines](#), YMCA Child Protection and Aquatic Safety Membership Qualification FAQs, and Aquatic Safety Resource Documents on the [Aquatic Safety page](#) on Link.

Safe Sport and Athlete Protection

The YMCA is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for all, especially in preventing abuse of any kind.

YMCA Child Abuse Prevention and Aquatic Safety Membership Qualification – This membership qualification (commonly called a membership standard) establishes minimum safety practices for YMCAs in the areas of child abuse prevention and aquatic safety.

All member associations are required to annually confirm adherence to these safety practices to maintain their status as a YMCA. Refer to the [Policy Checklist](#) for the Child Abuse Prevention and Aquatic Safety Membership Qualification.

Federal Safe Sport Law – Y-USA recommends that all local YMCAs offering youth sports programs, including competitive swimming, establish policies and procedures that comply with the requirements of the federal Safe Sport Law. It is imperative that all YMCA swim team staff, volunteers, and parents are aware of their local YMCA requirements and that they follow them.

YMCA national events (YMCA Short Course, Long Course, and Diving National Championships) will comply fully with the Safe Sport Law. This includes the following:

- Completing a [background screening](#) within the past two years—all coaches and volunteers
- Completing an approved [athlete protection training](#) within the past 12 months—all coaches, volunteers, and athletes age 18 and older
- Signing a [code of conduct](#) for the event—all coaches, volunteers, and athletes age 18 and older

Find information about the Safe Sport Law and the Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies on the [U.S. Center for Safe Sport site](#).

YMCA Inter-association Meets

Closed YMCA inter-association meets provide an opportunity for swimmers to challenge themselves individually while being part of a larger team and representing their YMCA community. In order to achieve this purpose and create this learning experience, the following minimum standards exist for such meets:

- At least two (2) teams from different YMCA associations (different association numbers) take part.

- At least six (6) competitors from each team participate, except in sanctioned championship meets for which there are time standard requirements.
- At least five (5) individual events are contested in the meet. A "distance" meet in which a minimum of two (2) individual events, each 400 yards/meters or longer, are contested will be considered a valid YMCA meet as long as the number of teams and swimmers required still applies.
- The number of events is based on the distance and stroke, not male and female designation or age group designation. For example, offering men's 1000 Freestyle and women's 1000 Freestyle is one event: 1000 Freestyle.
- Certified officials conduct the meet (in all cases, at least two officials must be YMCA Certified, including one certified as a Level II Official who acts as the Meet Referee):
 - Dual Meets require at least three (3) officials, including a starter, a Referee, and an Administrative Official. The starter and Referee may also serve as stroke & turn judges, if necessary.
 - All other meets require at least four (4) officials, including a Referee, a starter (who may also act as a stroke & turn judge), a stroke & turn judge, and an Administrative Official.
 - Any YMCA Level II Official can function as the Administrative Official, but not in that role and another deck role (e.g., the Deck Referee cannot also serve as the Administrative Official).
 - USA Swimming Certified Officials may assist with officiating such meets if there are at least two YMCA Certified Officials, one of whom is a YMCA Level II Official and acts as the Meet Referee.

Additional regulations:

- An [application](#) may be made to the National Eligibility Committee for pre-approval to count participation in two or more days of a closed YMCA invitational as two YMCA meets. To take advantage of this special allowance, a swimmer must compete in at least two separate days of the meet. **This is intended only for teams that are located at a significant geographical distance from other YMCA teams.**
- A dual meet cannot serve as two YMCA meets, even if it is scheduled over two days.
- A single meet, regardless of length of days contested, may not be counted both as one of the closed inter-association meets and a sanctioned championship meet for the purpose of satisfying those qualification requirements for YMCA National Championship Meets.
- A single closed YMCA meet—a dual, tri, invitational, etc.—may not be counted as separate dual meets. For example, a tri meet may not be counted as two dual meets.

YMCA Championship Meets

YMCA championship meets must be conducted as formal competition (RTG Rule I) in which

- teams or individuals are officially designated by a local YMCA to represent that YMCA,
- entry fees are charged,
- standings are kept, and
- awards are given.

YMCA Sanctioned Meets

The purpose of a YMCA sanction is to verify that a YMCA invitational or championship meet is conducted according to the YMCA national meet standards. Dual meets are not eligible for a YMCA sanction.

A sanction ensures that

- a meet is conducted according to YMCA national standards and
- the meet has met the minimum standards to apply for USA Swimming Approval and have its results entered into the USA Swimming SWIMS database.

Participation in a sanctioned YMCA championship meet is also a requirement for a swimmer to be eligible to participate in a YMCA National Championship Meet.

Sanction application, payment, and supporting documents must be submitted online through the YMCA Swimming and Diving website at least 45 days prior to the first day of the meet.

Please refer to the [YMCA Sanctioned Meets document](#) for a checklist of requirements for YMCA sanctioned meets and an explanation of those requirements.

Use of High School and Other Times for Meet Entry

High school swim meets are swum under National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) rules, which differ slightly from the USA Swimming technical rules in a number of areas. For a time from a high school meet to be accepted, that meet must have been observed by USA Swimming or YMCA officials in accordance with USA Swimming Rule 202.7. The printed results of the event must show the USA Swimming Observed Meet number issued by the Local Swim Committee and must be signed by one of the USA Swimming or YMCA observers. Most high school meets are not observed meets, and arrangements for a meet to be observed must be made well in advance of the meet. Coaches hoping to use a time from such a meet should contact the Meet Director in advance to determine whether the meet will be observed.

Swimmers with Disabilities

The YMCA National Championship meets include the participation of swimmers with a disability who have been nationally or internationally classified and have met the Y membership and meet participation eligibility requirements for the meet. The qualifying standard for swimmers with disabilities at the YMCA National Championship Meets will be the CanAm Paralympic time standards in their classification.

Local YMCA meets are encouraged to include athletes with disabilities as well. While the CanAm Paralympic time standards are used at the national level, other YMCA meets should waive time standards or set them no faster than CanAm standards for these athletes.

Classification occurs at designated World Para Swimming Sanctioned Meets (for International Classification) and at U.S. Para Swimming Sanctioned Meets (for National Classification).

Swim Officials Certification

YMCAs are expected to have certified YMCA Swim Officials on the deck at all meets. For a meet to be recognized as a qualifying closed competition meet, it must be officiated by at least three certified officials, including an Administrative Official. At least two of the officials must be YMCA Certified Officials, one of whom must be a YMCA Level II Official who acts as the Meet Referee.

A Swim Officials Certification module has been incorporated into the YMCA of the USA Program Training Certification System. Each YMCA is encouraged to have a sufficient number of YMCA certified officials to officiate its home and away dual meets. Larger YMCA teams are also encouraged to have at least one person certified as a Swim Officials Trainer.

The YMCA Swim Officials Certification Program involves three categories of certification. Level I Certified Officials are trained to take on the roles of a stroke & turn judge, place judge, relay take-off judge, timer, or scorer. Level II Certified Officials are authorized to act as referees, starters, and chief judges in addition to any of the Level I positions. Administrative Officials are authorized to handle the administrative aspects of the meet, including determining the official times and order of finish.

YMCA Swim Officials certifications are valid for three years.

Prerequisites for Level I, Level II, and Administrative Official certification and re-certification, and for becoming a certified YMCA Swim Officials Trainer, are listed on the [YMCA Swimming and Diving website](#) and in [LCDIC](#).