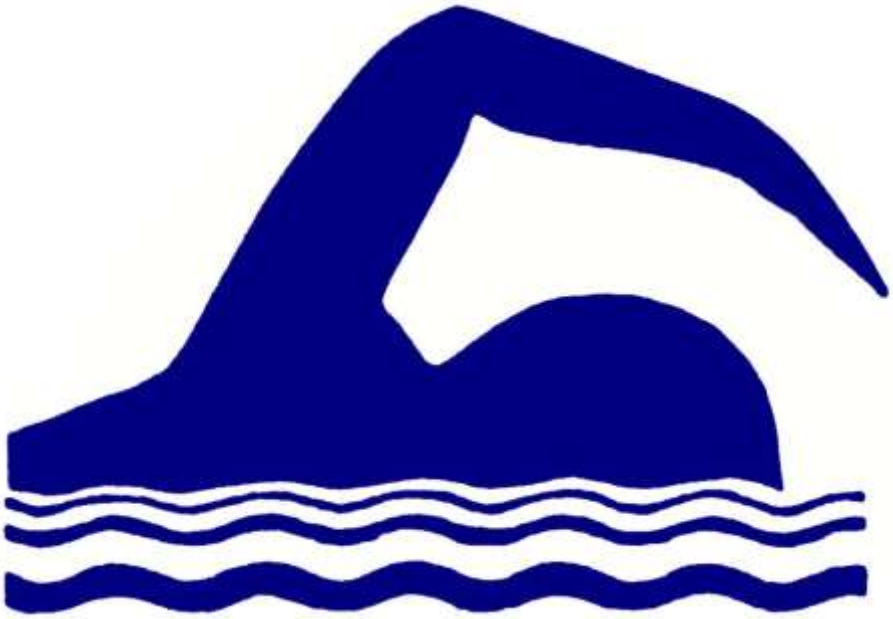
2026 MCSL



Officials Guide

2026 MCSL OFFICIAL'S GUIDE

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Please Note – Online Version Takes Precedence

This online version of the MCSL Officials Guide supersedes the printed versions because it contains USA Swimming and MCSL Technical Rule changes that came into effect after the Officials Guide was printed.

Below is a summary of the additional technical rule changes that are in effect starting with the 2026 MCSL season (they are marked with ^^ in the rules section below):

- Swimmers may be submerged while finishing in butterfly and freestyle
- Therapeutic elastic tape (including Kinesio tape) is no longer prohibited

The body of the Officials Guide has been updated to incorporate these changes.

Introduction

Swimming officials ensure that swimmers may swim in a uniformly fair competitive environment. To do this, officials must know and understand the rules. The **Referee** is the final arbiter of all problems or protests that involve judgmental matters concerning compliance of the swimmers and other officials with the technical rules. The **Starter** is the only official who directly interacts with the swimmers. **Stroke and Turn Judges** have the authority to disqualify swimmers for rules violations that they observe. It is essential that their decisions be correct and impartial. In this regard, there is no substitute for good judgment, or common sense. These comments apply to meets of every kind, be they high school, NCAA, summer league or the Olympics!

Officials must be knowledgeable of the current MCSL rules and their interpretation. That means obtaining a copy and becoming thoroughly familiar with the MCSL Handbook. Officials should study the Handbook extensively, attend certification clinics, consult those with more knowledge and experience and learn the circumstances that prompted any recent changes in the rules. The greater your interest and activity and the greater your exposure to sources of information, the better you will become. The best way for an official to stay out of trouble is to know the rules and stick to them. Officials who deviate from the rules, no matter how well intentioned the effort, invite protests and challenges to their decisions.

Warm-up Procedures

1. Warm-ups are to be monitored by the Referee and/or by Marshals designated by him or her. The Referee should be sure to discuss warm-up procedures with coaches.

2. Headfirst entry into the water is permitted <u>only</u> 1) during an event, 2) during a supervised warm-up or 3) during a supervised practice. In all cases, water depth must be at least 4 feet and all swimmers must exit away from the starting end.

3. During general warm-up, swimmers will enter the water feet first and circle swim. No entry from sides of pool, no use of training aids (kickboards, paddles).

4. Sprint lanes may be designated by the Referee or Marshals. When using sprint lanes, swimmers will perform a racing start at the deeper end of the pool, swim to the opposite end and exit there. A Marshal, who, for this purpose may be a coach, must monitor each sprint lane along with the rest of their swimmers.

Rule Changes

The following rule changes are in effect starting with the 2026 season:

2.e.3 Uniform: In swimming competitions, the swimmer must wear only one swimsuit in one or two pieces. It is permissible for the swimmer to wear a single set of garments underneath his or her competition suit for modesty and privacy reasons. **Wearing a t-shirt or rashguard is also permitted provided that it does not violate any other subclause of Rule 2.e.**

^^**2.e.10** The use of therapeutic elastic tape (including Kinesio tape) is no longer prohibited. This rule is reworded: As a consequence of injury, it is permissible to tape together not more than two fingers or toes.

11.j.ii.2 Electronic Exchange: Refer to MCSL Handbook for the complete rule. This change affects Team Reps and coaches pre-meet exchange. It updates terminology from "email exchange" to "electronic exchange". It emphasizes that entries must be exchanged at a mutually agreeable time and teams cannot revise entries based on review of other team's entries. Teams waive right to protest if electronic exchange is used.

18.g.4 The swimmer must ***remain*** and finish the race in the same lane in which they started.

MCSL Technical Rules - 1.a.v The Start: A swimmer shall be disqualified for an illegal starting position at the start if the swimmer moves from a legal starting position to an illegal starting position immediately prior to or after the "take your marks" command provided that the illegal starting position exists when the signal to start the race is given. Enforcement of the correct starting position is the responsibility of the Starter or the Stroke and Turn Judges.

^^**MCSL Technical Rules - 3.e Butterfly Finish**: At the finish, the body shall be on the breast and the touch shall be made with both hands separated and simultaneously at, above, or below the water surface. **Additionally, once some part of the head of the swimmer has passed the final backstroke flags, immediately prior to reaching for the finish, the swimmer may be completely submerged.**

^^**MCSL Technical Rules – 4.b Backstroke Stroke:** Remove last sentence (that sentence is now incorporated in the backstroke finish rule). The remainder of the rule is unchanged.

^^**MCSL Technical Rules – 4.d Backstroke Finish**: Upon the finish of the race, the swimmer must touch the wall while on the back. **Additionally, once some part of the head of the swimmer has passed the final backstroke flags, immediately prior to reaching for the finish, the swimmer may be completely submerged.**

^^**MCSL Technical Rules – 5.d Freestyle Finish:** The swimmer shall have finished the race when any part of his person touches the wall after completing the prescribed distance. **Additionally, once some part of the head of the swimmer has passed the final backstroke flags, immediately prior to reaching for the finish, the swimmer may be completely submerged.**

Below is a recap of rule changes from recent years (only rule changes from the past few years are listed with the effective year indicated. Please refer to the MCSL Handbook for complete rules):

11.q, 12.i, 13.r New relay entry cards (2025). Teams enter swimmers in relay events at the meet by entering each swimmer's last name and first name in the space provided for that leg of the relay on the **white** MCSL "Official Relay Entry Card" and presenting the card to the clerk of course. **Place a checkmark in the appropriate column to identify relay legs containing a swim-up.** Teams must use **blue cards for exhibition relays**. The old ivory and yellow relay entry cards are deprecated and should no longer be used.

General – Rules of Sportsmanship 3.e (2024) Any MCSL team that conducts itself in an unsportsmanlike manner or creates an unsportsmanlike or unsafe environment may be considered for appropriate action or penalty by the MCSL Board.

2.e.12 Swim suit rule (2024). No technical suits are permitted for 12 and under athletes.

8.d.3 (2023) Online test: First-time stroke and turn officials must pass an online test with a grade of 85% or higher.

8.d.4 (2023) Initial Referee Certification: Effective with the 2024 MCSL season, any official desiring certification as a Referee must have two years' experience as a certified MCSL stroke and turn judge. Teams, or new teams joining the league, for which this requirement would pose an undue hardship may petition the MCSL Board for an exception on a team-by-team basis.

8.d.6 (**2024**) CCSDA Stroke and Turn Judges. A CCDSA certified Stroke and Turn judge may be MCSL certified based on his/her CCSDA certification. *CCSDA Stroke and Turn judges requesting first time reciprocity are subject to 8.d.3.*

Rules for Starts (2023): have been modified to indicate that the "Take Your Marks" command is now used.

Rules for Swimming the Strokes 1.b and 1.c (2023): it is no longer required that breaststroke arm pulls or leg kicks be in the same horizontal plane.

Rules for Swimming the Strokes 3.b (2023): The following verbiage is added: *Additionally, once some part of the head of the swimmer has passed the final backstroke flags immediately prior to reaching the finish, the swimmer may be completely submerged prior to the touch*.

Swimwear

Rule 2.e – Swimwear: MCSL has adopted USA Swimming Rule 102.8.1, which addresses the issue of the design of eligible swimsuits for competition:

1. Swimwear shall include only a swimsuit, cap, and goggles. It is not permissible to wear more than two (2) caps.
2. Armbands or leg bands shall not be regarded as parts of the swimsuit and are not allowed.
3. In swimming competitions, the swimmer must wear only one swimsuit in one or two pieces. It is permissible for the swimmer to wear a single set of garments underneath his or her competition suit for modesty and privacy reasons. Wearing a t-shirt or rashguard is also permitted provided that it does not violate any other subclause of Rule 2.e.
4. All swimsuits shall be made from textile materials and must not be made of any rubberized type of material such as polyurethane or neoprene. For men, the swimsuit shall not extend above the navel nor below the knees. For women, the swimsuit shall not cover the neck, extend past the shoulder, nor extend below the knee. No zippers or other fastening devices are allowed, except for a waist tie on a brief or jammer. Exemptions to this rule will be granted only for conflicts due to a swimmer's religious beliefs, medical conditions, gender diversity, or any other reasons deemed appropriate by the Chair of the Rules Committee
5. A swimmer shall not wear a suit or cap bearing the name, insignia, or logo of any team or pool other than the MCSL team represented by the swimmer.
6. Swimsuits worn for competition must be non-transparent and conform to the current concept of the appropriate.
7. No swimmer is permitted to wear or use any device, substance or swimsuit to help his/her speed, pace, buoyancy or endurance during a race (such as webbed gloves, flippers, fins, power bands, adhesive substances, etc.)
8. Goggles may be worn and rubdown oil applied if not considered excessive by the Referee
9. The use of technology and automated data collection devices is permissible for the sole purpose of collecting data. Automated devices shall not be utilized to transmit data, sounds, or signals to the swimmer and may not be used to aid their speed.
10. As a consequence of injury, it is permissible to tape together not more than two fingers or toes.
11. No exemption to the swimsuit rule will be made that gives the swimmer a competitive advantage.
12. No technical suit shall be worn by any 12 and under MCSL athlete in competition at any dual meet, division relay meet, division championship meet, Coaches Invitational Long Course Meet, All Star Relay and Individual All Star meets.
    - A Technical Suit is one that has the following components:

- Any suit with bonded or taped seams regardless of its fabric or silhouette;
- Any suit with woven fabric extending past the hips
- Note WOVEN FABRIC: A suit with woven fabric and sewn seems that does not extend below the hips is permitted
- Note KNIT FABRIC: A suit with knit fabric and sewn seems not extending below the knees is permitted

Rule 2.f Penalty: Any violation of rule 2.e will result in disqualification without further warning except a swimmer that is observed to violate rule 2.e.4, 2.e.5 or 2.e.12 shall receive one warning to correct the uniform. If the observation of a violation occurs before the event, the swimmer shall correct the uniform before the start of the race. If the observation of the violation occurs after the start of an event, then the swimmer must correct the violation prior to their next event. Failure to correct the violation after a warning prior to an event will result in disqualification in that event. A brief delay to allow inverting a swim cap is appropriate. A delay to allow changing a swimsuit is not appropriate.

12 and under technical suit prohibition: Virtually all suits that fall within the definition of restricted have a FINA (World Aquatics) approved logo. Suits with the FINA logo that are considered legal for 12 and under use have an additional green checkmark logo in conjunction with the FINA logo. FINA logo only: not legal for 12 and unders to wear in MCSL competition. FINA logo <u>and</u> green check mark: legal for 12 and unders to wear in MCSL competition. If there is no FINA logo and no green checkmark or you are unsure regarding the material composition or legality of a suit, then the swimmer gets the benefit of the doubt. The burden is on the parents, coaches and swimmers to know if a suit is legal prior to competition. Officials are not suit police. Any concern about a suit should be brought to the attention of the Referee.

(Note that a simple way to hide an improper logo on a suit or cap is to cover the logo with duct tape.)

The scratch meeting is a good time for the Referee to ensure that Coaches and Team Representatives are aware of attire rules (swimsuit and caps) to ensure that swimmers are properly attired for competition.

Clarifications

The items listed below are not rule changes; rather they provide additional information to help ensure clear understanding of the referenced rules. Please refer to the complete rule in the MCSL Handbook.

Rules 11.j.1 and 11.q – Teams must exchange entries for individual events and current team rosters by the deadline. Each team is assumed to have two relays. The Relay Entry Card serves as the official entry for relays and there is no requirement to enter relays prior to presenting the Relay Entry Card to the Clerk of Course.

Rule 19.a - Protests involving judgement decisions by starter, stroke and turn judges and relay take-off judges *must be considered and resolved* at the meet.

Rules for Swimming the Strokes, 15 meter mark – MCSL will use the far end backstroke flags to judge 15 meter violations.

Rules for Swimming the Strokes 7.c.5 – a hand of the outgoing swimmer does not need to be in contact with the wall or deck during in-water relay exchanges; the outgoing swimmer not having a hand in contact with the wall or deck at any point during a relay exchange is not a basis for disqualification.

Rules for Swimming the Strokes 7.m: The 14 and Under Graduated Medley Relay is comprised of one swimmer from each of the 8 and under, 9-10, 11-12 and 13-14 age groups. Each swimmer swims one 25 meter length of back, breast, fly or free. Any age group may swim any relay leg, but all four age groups must be represented.

DQ Handling

We will continue handling disqualifications in "A" meets by requiring that the signatures of the Referee, Stroke & Turn Judge, and the coach or designated team representative of the swimmer involved be on each DQ form. If a team decides to assign someone other than the coach or team rep to sign the DQ form, the individual must be designated in that capacity before the start of the meet with proper notification to the Referee. The Referee must notify the coach or designated representative of the disqualification prior to start of the next event. The DQ card then becomes part of the official record of the meet. This process has successfully reduced protests to the league based upon the failure or perceived failure of the Referee to properly notify the coach that a swimmer has been disqualified. The Referee should ensure that this process is well defined during his or her meetings with coaches and officials prior to the meet.

DQ forms used in A meets shall conform to the MCSL template.

Basic Concepts of Officiating

A. Take officiating seriously and work hard at it.
    1. Study the MCSL Handbook (provided to each team)
    2. Attend MCSL Officials Clinics regularly to keep up with rule changes and new interpretations and maintain league certification.
    3. If you have questions, seek help from experienced officials on your team or in your division or from MCSL Clinic Instructors. You can also e-mail clinics@mcsl.org)
    4. Be fair and consistent – *always give the benefit of the doubt to the swimmer.*
    5. Call violations as seen – don't guess, anticipate or discuss with anyone other than the Referee.
B. Work regularly at the job

1. Officials need practice just as competitors do
2. Working regularly builds confidence.
3. There is no substitute for experience.

C. Be professional in manner.
1. Make decisions and raise your hand promptly and decisively when you see an infraction.
2. Give no outward manifestations during a race regarding illegality of a swimmer except for raised hand.
3. The Referee should tell the coach or assigned representative the reason(s) for a disqualification. Avoid coaching swimmers.
4. Control your emotions and DO NOT CHEER.
5. Make every effort to disregard team affiliation.
6. Don't fraternize with swimmers, coaches or spectators during the meet.
7. Admit a mistake if you are wrong.
8. Give undivided attention, start to finish.

D. Uniform: Officials look "official" if dressed properly. Remember you are representing yourself, your team and the MCSL – be professional in your attire and demeanor.
1. Men: navy blue slacks or shorts (no cutoffs), white shirt, and white rubber-soled shoes.
2. Women: navy blue skirt, slacks or shorts, white shirt, and white rubber-soled shoes.
3. Look neat and well groomed.

Referee

Authority and Responsibility:

The Referee:

- Shall have full authority over all officials and shall assign their positions and jurisdictions.

- Prior to the beginning of the meet, the Referee shall confer with the Starter and hold a briefing with the Stroke and Turn Judges.

- Shall enforce all applicable rules and shall decide all questions relating to the actual conduct of the meet, the final settlement of which is not otherwise determined by the rules.

- Can overrule any meet official on a point of technical rule interpretation, or on a judgment decision pertaining to an action that he/she has personally observed.

- Has the authority to disqualify a swimmer for any violation of the rules that he/she personally observes. **Although this is permitted, it is not recommended**. Referees

should focus on all aspects of the meet and **not** do the jobs of the Stroke and Turn Judges but should instruct them as every meet is a learning experience.

- Before each race, shall signal to the starter that all officials are in position, that the course is clear, and that the competition can begin.

- Shall give a decision on any point where the opinions of the judges differ.

- May prohibit the use of any bell, siren, horn or other artificial noisemaker during the meet.

- May modify starting rules for handicapped swimmers. Refer to the Disabled Swimmers section of this guide or Article 105 in the USA Swimming Rules and Regulations.

- Shall observe all starts. After the Referee or the Starter observes what they believe to be a false start, they shall confer. If they agree, the offending swimmer shall be charged with a false start.

Because Referees are ultimately responsible for all technical decisions made at a meet, they have the authority to overrule calls made by other officials. The rules are explicit in indicating that such an action is warranted only if the Referee believes that the official incorrectly interpreted a rule, or if the Referee personally observed the violation. Referees are also expected to correct officials who are not performing properly and, in the extreme, to replace such officials. Officials who insist on cheering when their children are swimming, or who cannot control their emotions when their team is affected, should be calmly advised to proceed to the cheering section where they can do as they wish. Conversely, on occasion some officials will ask to switch lanes or areas of responsibility when their children are involved. This practice is to be discouraged since such officials will likely not pay attention to their assigned areas when they are moved.

Finally, in rendering official decisions, the Referee should do so promptly and decisively. It is well to remember that *the benefit of any doubt must go to the swimmer*, but also recall that you are obliged to be fair not only to the individual involved, but to the other contestants as well. A tip in making tough decisions is to adopt a helpful rather than a punitive attitude towards rules enforcement. Officials are not on the deck to see how many swimmers they can disqualify. They are there to ensure that the competition is conducted in a completely fair and equitable environment.

In summary, the Referee has maximum official authority at a meet. In order to exercise this authority properly, the Referee needs thorough knowledge of the rules and good judgment.

Referee's Checklist

Being well prepared pays dividends in meet efficiency and minimizing potential problems. Referees should take ample time for meet preparation.

The night before the meet:

1. Read the rules in MCSL Handbook. Be familiar with the Meet Management ("Green" Book) and Officials Guide. Review clinic notes.
2. Check with the coach and team reps for any potential problems.
3. Are the backstroke flags set at 5 yards or 5 meters?
4. Is the pool filled to the highest level?
5. Make sure starting unit is charged.

The day of the meet:

1. Wear the appropriate uniform.

2. Bring rulebook and notes.

3. Arrive at least 15 minutes before warm-ups begin. Appoint Marshals to monitor warm-ups (Stroke & turn judges and timers can do this).

4. Check with Team Reps.
   a. Review list of officials and be certain that all positions are filled.
   b. Determine who will be assigned as relay take-off judges. If team reps have not specifically assigned relay take-off judges then use timers from lane 1 and lane 6.
   c. Advise team reps to come to the Referee with any problems.
   d. Determine who will be acknowledging disqualifications.
   e. Determine if there are any swimmers with special needs participating in the meet.

5. Check the facility:
   a. Ladders and obstructions removed.
   b. Lower diving boards removed.
   c. Lane lines secure and tightened.
   d. Backstroke flags installed properly.
   e. PA system operative.
   f. Pool filled to highest level.
   g. Starting system operating properly.

6. Assemble all officials, introduce key officials, and give greeting and any instructions pertinent to the home pool (e.g., facilities issues).

7. Brief Stroke & Turn Judges:
   a. Where to stand and rotation system. S&T judges shall be at the ends of the pool.
   b. Review recent rule changes.
   c. Review rules for the strokes.
   d. Review jurisdiction of each judge.
   e. Review raising hand upon infraction and Referee notifying coach of the violation. Detail what should be written on DQ slips. Ask S&T: 1) What did you see? 2) What was the infraction 3) What position were you in to see the infraction?

f. All DQs are to be reported to the Referee and signed by Referee, S&T judge, and coach of disqualified swimmer or other identified team representative before the slip goes to the automation table. (If a swimmer is disqualified for a false start and the start signal is not given, the team must be informed before the heat may be started, as the swimmer shall be permitted to swim the event as an exhibition swim.) For individual events, the DQ card shall contain the swimmer's name and team. For relay events, the DQ card shall contain the swimmer number (1-4) and team name. This information shall be filled in by the Referee, as the Referee will have an updated meet program that reflects any changes made during the scratch meeting. This shall be done before the next event begins.

8. Begin instruction of Timers (or have Starter or Head Timer do it).

The following may be used as a guide in instructing the timers.

a. Assure that their watch is always functioning properly during the meet by:
   (1) Checking its accuracy at the Starters time check.
   (2) Watching it occasionally during each event to make certain it is operating.

b. Look at the starting device and start watches at the sight of the flash - *not by the sound (unless the strobe does not fire or is not seen)*. Timers should feel free at the start of a race to move to a position from which they can clearly see the starting device as long as they are behind the swimmers.

c. Before the end of each race, Timers should position themselves at the end of the pool and be in position to observe the swimmer touch the end of the pool in order to obtain the most accurate time possible.

d. The watch should be stopped *when any part of the swimmer's body touches the solid wall* at the end of the pool (or the touch pad if automatic officiating equipment is being used). It is not the responsibility of the Timer to judge if the finish touch meets the requirements of the appropriate stroke finish rule.

e. If, during any event, a Timer discovers that he/she has failed to properly start or stop the watch or that the watch is not functioning properly, the Timer should immediately notify the Head Timer or Assistant Head Timer.

f. The official time used will be the time of two watches that agree, or the middle time if none agree, and will be recorded to the hundredths (e.g., 1:35.79). If times from only two watches are available, the average should be recorded to the hundredth of a second and rounded down (thousandths should be dropped, i.e., 1:25.435 is recorded as 1:25.43). If a time from only one watch is available and that time is determined to be a valid time, the time from that watch will be the official time.

g. The Head Timer shall collect all lane/timer sheets and shall check and approve the official time reported at each lane for each event. If valid times are available from less than three watches on a lane, the Head Timer shall have the Assistant Head Timer verify the validity

of the available times by initialing the card or lane/timer sheet and presenting the card or lane/timer sheet to the Referee for his initials.

h. Timers should ensure that electronic devices are set on silence. In addition, MCSL strongly advocates that any device capable of taking a picture (cell phone, tablet, etc) not be displayed or used immediately behind the starting area.

i. Relay take-off judging. Timers asked to serve as a lane or side take-off judge for a relay event should watch the feet of the outgoing swimmer leave the deck or wall and then look to see if the incoming swimmer has touched the wall. If the incoming swimmer has not touched the wall, it is an early take-off. Write an X through any early exchanges on the relay take-off slip. Do not raise your hand or otherwise communicate that a take-off infraction has occurred.

9. Assign and Brief Relay Takeoff Judges
Check with Team Reps to see who will be assigned to judge relay take-offs. Do not wait for the Scratch Meeting to do this. Ensure that those assigned as relay take-off judges are properly briefed on how to judge relay take-offs.

The Take-off judging configuration shall consist of four (4) Take-Off Judges at each end of the pool requiring relay exchanges with two of the judges positioned on the side of the pool (Side Take-off judges) and two of the judges positioned in the middle of the pool (Lane Take-off judges). The Lane Take-off judges shall be positioned between lanes three (3) and four (4). The Side Take-off judge closest to lane one (1) and the Lane Take-off judge closest to lane three (3) have jurisdiction over lanes one (1) through three (3) and the Side Take-off judge closest to lane six (6) and Lane Take-off judge closest to lane four (4) have jurisdiction over lanes four (4) through six (6). Additionally, any two Take-off judges with jurisdiction over the same relay exchanges (observing take-offs for the same lanes) may not be from the same team.

Note: Even if Side and Lane Take-off judges have been pre-assigned, remember to take a moment to check that the Take-off judges are ready and in place prior to the start of each relay event.

Take-off judges shall determine whether the feet of the departing swimmer remain in contact, or for in-water take-offs whether some part of the body remains in contact with the wall or deck, until the incoming swimmer touches the wall. The Take-off judge is not responsible for determining if the swimmer pushed off from the wall or the bottom.

The Referee should confirm with each Take-off judge that they know how to judge Take-offs and are comfortable potentially DQing a relay.

Specifically:

a. One Side and one Lane Take-off judge with responsibility for lanes 1-3 and another pair of Side and Lane Take-off judges with responsibility for lanes 4-6. Each pair of take-off judges shall not consist of personnel from the same team.

b. Observe the feet of outgoing swimmer leave the deck or wall, then shift gaze to observe the hands of the incoming swimmer for the touch.
c. In case of illegal takeoff, no signal is given. Illegal takeoffs shall be noted on the relay takeoff slip. Circle good exchanges on the relay take-off slip and mark an X through illegal exchanges. At the end of the race the relay Take-off judge shall notify the Referee. *There must be dual confirmation to disqualify*, discuss only with the Referee. Both the Side and Lane Take-off judges shall sign the DQ slip for dual confirmed early take-off violations. For dual meets and divisionals, collect both lane and side take-off slips and turn in to automation along with the DQ slip.

10. Meet with other officials:
    a. Starter:
        1. Dual confirmation of false start. Discuss how this will be accomplished.
        2. Referee should inform swimmer of false start.
        3. Review MCSL starting procedures.
        4. Determine where the Starter wants to stand. The Starter shall stand on the side of the pool within approximately five meters of the starting end of the pool. The Starter and Referee should be in close proximity to one another. The starting unit shall be positioned in the general vicinity of the start end backstroke flags.
        5. The Starter shall observe relay exchanges to ensure that swimmers entering the water from the deck take no more than one step to bring them to their starting position. The Starter shall also ensure that no individual aids another swimmer by pushing them into the water at the start of a race or relay leg. The Starter shall raise his/her hand if he/she observes a violation of these rules. This applies to all relay exchanges for swimmers entering the water from the deck at dual meets and divisionals, and to relay exchanges for swimmers entering the water from the deck at the end of the pool where the Starter is positioned during Relay Carnivals.
        6. If desired, the Starter can assist the Referee by recording the order of finish.
    b. Announcer:
        1. Should announce current events and call swimmers to starting end for subsequent events.
        2. Help in controlling crowd noise.
        3. Avoid too many announcements.
    c. Clerk of Course:
        It is best to have representatives from both teams (all teams at Division meets). The job of the Clerk is to assist the swimmers to find their proper events and lanes. The Clerk and Announcer should work together.
    d. Computer table:
        Check at the outset to ensure that all is under control and revisit periodically to offer assistance with any problems or questions.

11. Conduct a Scratch Meeting.
    This should take place after warm-ups, about 15 minutes before the scheduled start of the meet. A Coach and Team Representative from each team should attend. At this time coaches present any changes in lineup, which must be done in compliance with MCSL rules for substitutions and scratches. The coaches and the Clerk(s) should be very clear on any and all

changes. DQ procedures should also be reviewed at this time. The scratch meeting is also a good time to remind coaches about legal swim attire (suits and caps).

12. Meet with Coaches:
    a. Respond to any questions coaches may have.
    b. Determine if there are any special need swimmers relative to starts.
    c. Advise that all problems be addressed with Referee.
    d. Advise about placement of backstroke flags.

During the meet:

1. Assume and maintain complete control.
2. Watch start and entire race closely - Supervise officials. The Referee may call obvious infractions but should not "over judge" any quadrant. The Referee must confirm a false start. The best position is usually next to Starter so the Referee can see what the Starter sees.
3. Don't start the next event until all questions are settled concerning the present one. Make sure Stroke and Turn Judges are in position.
4. Ensure you are aware of and initial the lane timer sheets for any lane where less than three valid times were obtained. Referee or Starter recorded order of finish may be used to determine order of finish when no valid times exist for a lane.
5. Control swimmers and spectators. Don't let them crowd areas of the deck needed for official purposes. Stop unwanted crowding early! Utilize team reps if necessary.
6. Show fairness and impartiality to all competitors and remember that by doing so you protect all swimmers rather than penalize a few.
7. Take your responsibility seriously - the swimmers worked hard to get where they are - but don't forget that, at the base of it all, this is a fun sport!
8. Have fun and try to see that everyone else does too.

After the Meet:

Thank officials for their help. Check with scorer's table and remain on site for at least 30 minutes after the meet has concluded. Use this time to check your recorded disqualifications with those on the results and to check one last time with the Team Reps from each team to make sure no open issues remain. Ask the announcer and the table not to share any final score until you have verified all disqualifications. If you find what you believe to be a discrepancy check the paperwork for that event before the score is announced and ask the head scorer and assistant to correct.

Chief Judge

USA Swimming defines a Chief Judge as follows: An overall "Chief Judge" may assign and supervise the activities of all Stroke and Turn and Take-off Judges and may report their decisions. If desired, any judging category may have a designated "Chief ". Any "Chief " may act as liaison for the judges and may serve simultaneously in one of the judging positions and shall assign those judges within the "Chief's" category.

Any person appointed to be a Chief Judge shall be MCSL certified as a Referee, be experienced (at least two year's experience as a Stroke and Turn judge) and be willing to supervise the activities of others.

For MCSL, a Chief Judge shall be responsible for the following:

1. Work with the Referee to determine Stroke & Turn Judge placement, jurisdiction, and rotation. The Referee may delegate authority to the Chief Judge to conduct the Stroke & Turn Judge briefing and make deck assignments.

2. Other duties for the Chief Judge as the Referee sees fit.

3. During the meet the Chief Judge will be positioned at the opposite end of the pool from the Referee and shall handle any Stroke & Turn infractions that are called by the Stroke & Turn Judges at the Chief Judge's end of the pool. Handling an infraction means that the Chief Judge will ask the S&T Judge what they saw, why it is an infraction, and where they were positioned. Once the Chief Judge has approved the disqualification, he or she will take it to the Referee for final approval and sign off.

4. The Chief Judge may fill in for a Stroke & Turn Judge in an emergency.

5. The Chief Judge works under the direct supervision of the Referee. The Chief Judge will not make Stroke & Turn calls, or any other call or judgment independent of the Referee, except as noted in the next item below. If the Chief Judge observes an infraction, the Chief Judge should talk to the Referee.

6. During Relay Carnivals, the Chief Judge shall observe relay exchanges to ensure that swimmers entering the water from the deck take no more than one step to bring them to their starting position and to ensure that no individual aids another swimmer by pushing them into the water at the start of a relay leg. The Chief Judge shall raise his/her hand if he/she observes a violation of these rules. This applies to relay exchanges for swimmers entering the water from the deck at the end of the pool where the Chief Judge is positioned.

MCSL recommends the use of a Chief Judge at all Divisional and All Star meets. MCSL does not recommend the use of a Chief Judge at dual "A" meets.

Stroke and Turn Judging

Authority and Responsibility

Stroke and Turn Judge: Ensures that the rules relating to the stroke, turn, kick and finish designated for the event are being observed.

Jurisdiction: Judges are assigned and instructed by the Referee who, before the competition, determines the area of stroke and turn responsibility for each Judge, i.e. it also relates to the area

of the pool to which the Judge is assigned (see **Position**, below). Stroke & Turn Judges should concentrate on swimmers in their assigned area.

Position: Stroke & Turn Judges should be positioned at both ends of the pool and instructed to observe the three lanes closest to their position.

Reporting violations:

1. Only the Referee or a Stroke and Turn Judge can disqualify for stroke, turn or finish violations.

2. Upon observing an infraction, the Judge shall immediately raise one hand overhead with open palm and then put their hand down and note lane and heat on their heat sheet or DQ slip. This requirement is intended to encourage officials to act decisively and to preclude consultation with other officials or reflect on the consequences of a call. The judge should then continue observing the remainder of the event.

   Good judgment and common-sense dictate that the Referee, in rare circumstances, may uphold a disqualification despite failure of the Judge to raise his/her hand. Example - if a swimmer is guilty of a violation, such as failure to finish a race, that was visible to all who were watching (including the Referee, who also did not raise his hand), the Referee will best serve the cause of fairness by allowing the disqualification.

3. Judges shall report violations to the Referee in writing, on the DQ slips provided, indicating the event, heat number (if applicable), lane number and the violation. The violation should be described clearly, so that those reading the DQ slips later can understand the basis for the disqualification.

4. The Referee will discuss the disqualification with the Judge until he or she is convinced that a violation did occur and that the Judge has no doubt about his observations.

5. The Referee shall ensure that for individual events, the DQ slip contains the swimmer's name and team. For relay events, the DQ card shall contain the swimmer number (1-4) and team name. The Referee shall provide this information as he/she will have an updated meet program that reflects any changes made at the scratch meeting.

6. *The Referee must seek out the coach or designated team representative of the swimmer involved and have them sign the DQ slip to acknowledge that they have been notified.* If a coach or designated team representative refuses to sign the DQ slip, the Referee shall note "refused to sign" on the DQ slip prior to submitting the slip to the table. This shall be done before the next event is started. Never tell a swimmer or a coach that a swimmer "came close to being disqualified." Close is perfectly legal (and may be desirable).

Disqualifications:

1. Must be based on designated Stroke and Turn official's observation.

2. Apply simple test: *Be sure the violation occurred, understand clearly what rule is involved, and be prepared to explain it.*

3. *Advantage or disadvantage (as a basis for making a judgment)*. There has been much debate over whether the potential advantage gained by a rule infraction should be a criterion for making a call. For example, an alternating (flutter) kick at the finish in butterfly or breaststroke could provide an advantage, while a missed turn in freestyle is less likely to do so. Stroke and Turn Judges should not use advantage/disadvantage as a factor in their judgments. A violation of the rules should be noted, and the competitor disqualified whether an advantage is gained or not.

4. *The Twice Theory*. Some judges feel that they should wait until an infraction is observed more than once before calling it, rationalizing that this "clears up any doubt", or "confirms that it wasn't a simple mistake by the swimmer". There is no basis for waiting to see an infraction twice and, in fact, you often won't. The official must be certain of what is seen and make the call as soon as it is observed. *If there is any doubt about the violation, then the call should not be made.* Remember not to concentrate on one swimmer to see if he or she commits the suspected infraction again. Ensure fairness and equity by observing all lanes in your jurisdiction uniformly.

5. General. MCSL Technical Rules in the MCSL Handbook apply.

6. Documentation and Timeliness. DQ cards are to follow the template provided by the MCSL. For individual events, the DQ card shall contain the name of the swimmer and the swimmer's team. For relay events, the DQ card shall contain the relay swimmer (1-4) and team name. The DQ card must be signed by the disqualifying official(s), the Referee, and the swimmer's coach or designated Team Representative. This must be done prior to the start of the next event. If a team wishes to have DQ's handled by a representative other than the coach, that representative must be identified to the referee at the start of the meet.

7. Relay take-offs. Dual confirmation is required; that is, both the Side Take-off Judge and the Lane Take-off Judge must record that a particular swimmer left early for a team to be disqualified. Running starts are not permitted in relay races, swimmers must be in a forward starting position when the relay exchange takes place. The swimmer may take at most one step to bring his/her foot to their starting position at the exchange. Both the Lane and Side Take-off judges shall sign the DQ slip for dual confirmed early take-off violations.

8. Failure to swim an event. Except for MCSL Invitational meets (Coaches Invitational Long Course and Individual All Stars), a swimmer who misses an event will be disqualified from that event but may swim his or her subsequent events; however, a swimmer may not swim an additional event because he or she missed an earlier event. At the MCSL Invitational meets, a swimmer who misses an event will be disqualified from that event and may be disqualified from subsequent events at the discretion of the Meet Referee and the MCSL Board.

The following is taken from the USA Swimming Rulebook:

1. A disqualification can be made only by the official within whose jurisdiction the infraction has been committed. Except for the Relay Take-off judges when dual confirmation relay take-off judging, as provided in 102.13.6B, is used, the Referee, Stroke, Turn, or Relay Take-off judge upon observing an infraction, shall immediately raise one hand overhead. If the official does not do so, there shall be no disqualification unless the meet is being conducted under World Aquatics procedures. (Note that if an official does not raise their hand, the Referee has the authority to disqualify a swimmer for a violation that he/she personally observes).

2. The Referee or designated official making a disqualification shall make every reasonable effort to seek out the swimmer or his/her coach and inform him/her as to the reason for the disqualification. Failure to notify does not negate the disqualification. Note that the MCSL rule overrides this (see Guide for Officials 12.j in the MCSL Handbook).

3. Any swimmer who acts in an unsportsmanlike or unsafe manner within the swimming venue may be considered for appropriate action or penalty by the Referee.

4. The swimmer must remain and finish the race in the same lane in which they started.

5. Standing on the bottom during a freestyle race shall not disqualify a swimmer, but a swimmer must not leave the pool, or walk, or spring from the bottom. Standing on the bottom during any other stroke shall result in disqualification.

6. Obstructing or otherwise interfering with another swimmer shall disqualify the offender, subject to the discretion of the Referee.

7. 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. (In MCSL, the next meet day only applies in the event of a postponed or interrupted meet).

8. Dipping goggles in the water or splashing water on the swimmer's face or body prior to an event shall not be considered as entering the pool unless the Referee finds that such action is interfering with the competition.

9. Should a foul endanger the chance of success of a swimmer(s), the Referee may allow the affected swimmer(s) to reswim the event. In case of collusion to foul another swimmer, the Referee may, at his/her discretion, disqualify the swimmer for whose aid the foul was committed, as well as the swimmer committing the foul.

10. Grasping lane dividers to assist forward motion is not permitted. (In MCSL this may also include the side coping stone, ladder or any other object that assists in forward motion.)

11. The time and/or place of any swimmer or relay team disqualified either during or following an event shall not be recorded in the results of that event. If awards have been made prior to the decision to disqualify they shall be returned and made to the proper recipient(s) and if points have been scored by those disqualified the event shall be rescored.

12. Time and/or place officially recorded for a swimmer shall not be nullified for violations occurring subsequent to such performance.

MCSL Technical Rules (Rules For Swimming The Strokes)

These are the MCSL rules, as presented in the USA Swimming Rules and Regulations with modifications for MCSL for Starts and Backstroke.

Introduction – Technical Rules.

It is helpful to think about the components of any swimming event separately. Judgment of the start is under the jurisdiction of the Starter and will not be discussed here. Each event has specific rules for the stroke, the turn and the finish. It is important for the swimmers and officials to understand where each component of the rule applies. For example, during a backstroke event, swimmers must be on the back during the "stroke" portion of the event. At the turn, defined as the interval from the time the hand (or shoulder or arm or head) touches the wall until the feet leave the wall, the swimmer is in "the turn". During the turn, he/she may be in any position desired. This type of analysis may be applied to all the swimming strokes. Judging should be impartial and governed by the premise that the benefit of the doubt always goes to the swimmer.

I. BREASTSTROKE

1. **Start** - The forward start shall be used.

2. **Stroke** – After the start and after each turn when the swimmer leaves the wall, the body shall be kept on the breast. It is not permitted to roll onto the back at any time except at the turn after the touch of the wall where it is permissible to turn in any manner as long as the body is on the breast when leaving the wall. Throughout the race the stroke cycle must be one arm stroke and one leg kick in that order. All movements of the arms shall be simultaneous without alternating movement. The hands shall be pushed forward together from the breast on, under, or over the water. The elbows shall be under water except for the final stroke before the turn, during the turn and for the final stroke at the finish. The hands shall be brought back on or under the surface of the water. The hands shall not be brought back beyond the hip line, except during the first stroke after the start and each turn. During each complete cycle, some part of the swimmer's head shall break the surface of the water. After the start and after each turn, the swimmer may take one arm stroke completely back to the

legs. The head must break the surface of the water before the hands turn inward at the widest part of the second stroke.

3. **Kick** - After the start and each turn, at any time prior to the first breaststroke kick a single butterfly kick is permitted. Following which, all movements of the legs shall be simultaneous without alternating movement. The feet must be turned outwards during the propulsive part of the kick. Scissors, alternating movements or downward butterfly kicks are not permitted except as provided herein. Breaking the surface of the water with the feet is allowed unless followed by a downward butterfly kick.

4. **Turns and Finish -** At each turn and at the finish of the race, the touch shall be made with both hands separated and simultaneously at, above, or below the water level. At the last stroke before the turn and at the finish an arm stroke not followed by a leg kick is permitted. The head may be submerged after the last arm pull prior to the touch, provided it breaks the surface of the water at some point during the last complete or incomplete cycle preceding the touch.

   Separated means that the hands cannot be stacked one on top of the other. It is not necessary to see space between the hands. Incidental contact at the fingers is not a concern.

5. **Common violations in breaststroke:**
   a. Sidestroke or scissors kick or any alternating movement.
   b. Multiple butterfly or alternating kicks coming off the start or turn or going into a turn or finish.
      NOTE: *A natural relaxation of the legs when coming off the wall at the turn, or a slight leg action induced by piking of the body when taking arm strokes at the start or turn shall not be considered a voluntary movement and, therefore, shall not be identified as a kick and be a cause for disqualification.*
   c. Feet not turned outward in propulsive movement of the kick (such as would be seen in a butterfly kick).
   d. Body not at or past the vertical towards the breast when the feet leave the wall after a turn.
   e. Hand touches not separated and simultaneous or 1-hand touch at a turn or finish. (NOTE: hands need not be on same level at turn or finish). Be alert for legal, "quick touch", which can be mistakenly interpreted as a 1-hand touch.

II. <u>BUTTERFLY</u>

1. **Start** - The forward start shall be used.

2. **Stroke** - After the start and after each turn, the swimmer's shoulders must be at or past the vertical toward the breast. The swimmer is permitted one or more leg kicks, but only one arm pull under water, which must bring the swimmer to the surface. It shall be permissible for a swimmer to be completely submerged for a distance of not more than 15 meters (16.4 yards) after the start and after each turn (in MCSL use the far end backstroke flags). By that point,

the head must have broken the surface. The swimmer must remain on the surface until the next turn or finish. From the beginning of the first arm pull, the body shall be kept on the breast except at the turn after the touch of the wall where it is permissible to turn in any manner as long as the body is on the breast when leaving the wall. Both arms must be brought forward simultaneously over the water and pulled back simultaneously under the water throughout the race.

In butterfly, the arms are defined as the area between the wrist and the shoulders; the entire portion of the arm between the wrist and shoulders must break the surface of the water with each recovery.

3. **Kick** - All up and down movements of the legs and feet must be simultaneous. The position of the legs or the feet need not be on the same level, but they shall not alternate in relation to each other. A scissors or breaststroke kicking movement is not permitted.

4. **Turns** - At each turn the body shall be on the breast. The touch shall be made with both hands separated and simultaneously at, above, or below the water surface. Once a touch has been made, the swimmer may turn in any manner desired. The shoulders must be at or past the vertical toward the breast when the swimmer leaves the wall.

5. **Finish** - At the finish, the body shall be on the breast and the touch shall be made with both hands separated and simultaneously at, above, or below the water surface. Additionally, once some part of the head of the swimmer has passed the final backstroke flags, immediately prior to reaching for the finish, the swimmer may be completely submerged.

   For butterfly turns and finishes, the interpretation of "separated" is identical to the interpretation for breaststroke turns and finishes.

6. **Common violations in butterfly:**
   a. Hand touches not separated and simultaneous or 1-hand touch at the turns or finish. (NOTE: hands need not be on same level at turn or finish). Be alert for legal, quick or swipe touch, which can be mistakenly interpreted as a 1-hand touch.
   b. Arm recovery not over the water after pull on turns or finish (usually characterized by short pull and stabbing touch).
   c. Alternating kicking movements (e.g., flutter kick).
   d. Scissors or breaststroke kicking movement.
   e. Non-simultaneous forward arm stroke over the water.

III. BACKSTROKE

1. **The Back Start** shall be used.

2. **Stroke** - Standing in or on the gutter or curling the toes over the lip of the gutter immediately after the start is not permitted. The swimmer shall push off on their back and continue swimming on the back throughout the race. Some part of the swimmer must break the surface of the water throughout the race, except it is permissible for the swimmer to be completely

submerged during the turn and for a distance of not more than 15 meters (16.4 yards) after the start and after each turn (in MCSL use the far end backstroke flags). By that point, the head must have broken the surface of the water.

In backstroke, "on the back" is interpreted as being at or past vertical towards the back.

3. **Turns** – Upon completion of each length, some part of the swimmer must touch the wall. After the swimmer's head has passed the backstroke flag, prior to the turn, the swimmer's upper shoulder may (but is not required to) rotate past vertical toward the breast before the touch is completed provided such rotation is accomplished by an initiation of the turning action or continuation into the wall. The initiation of the turning action shall be accomplished by a single-arm or simultaneous double-arm pull, or in the absence of such pulls, by a downward, underwater movement of the head. After the initiation of the turning action, no additional arm pulls may be started; however kicking and gliding actions are permitted. The swimmer must have returned to a position on the back upon leaving the wall.

4. **Finish** - Upon the finish of the race, the swimmer must touch the wall while on the back. Additionally, once some part of the head of the swimmer has passed the final backstroke flags, immediately prior to reaching for the finish, the swimmer may be completely submerged.

5. **Common Violations in backstroke:**
   a. Failure to return to at or past vertical toward back once the feet leave the wall on the turn.
   b. Shoulders rolling past vertical toward breast before touch at the finish.
   c. Failure to touch the wall with any part of body at the turn. A swimmer, who misses the touch and propels him/herself back to the wall, even though on the back, is illegal since this is not part of the turning movement.
   d. More than one arm pull following turning of the body onto the breast prior to turning.

IV. FREESTYLE

1. **Start** - The forward start shall be used.

2. **Stroke** – In an event designated freestyle, the swimmer may swim any style, except that in a medley relay or an individual medley event, freestyle means any style other than butterfly, breaststroke or backstroke. Some part of the swimmer must break the surface of the water throughout the race, except it shall be permissible for the swimmer to be completely submerged during the turn and for a distance of not more than 15 meters (16.4 yards) after the start and each turn (in MCSL use the far end backstroke flags). By that point, the head must have broken the surface.

3. **Turns -** Upon completion of each length the swimmer must touch the wall.

4. **Finish** - The swimmer shall have finished the race when any part of his person touches the wall after completing the prescribed distance. Additionally, once some part of the head of the

swimmer has passed the final backstroke flags, immediately prior to reaching for the finish, the swimmer may be completely submerged.

5. **Common Violations in freestyle**:
   a. Failure to touch with some part of body at the turn. (NOTE: if touch missed, swimmer may reach back or come back and make a legal touch).
   b. Finishing in the wrong lane.
   c. Walking on, or springing from, the bottom of the pool.
   d. Grasping or pulling on lane lines or side of the pool to assist forward motion.

V. INDIVIDUAL MEDLEY

The swimmer shall swim the prescribed distance in the following order: the first one-fourth, butterfly; the second one-fourth, backstroke; the third one-fourth, breaststroke; and the last one-fourth, freestyle.

1. **Start** - The forward start shall be used.

2. **Stroke** - The stroke for each one-fourth of the designated distance shall follow the prescribed rules for that stroke, except in the freestyle, the swimmer must be on the breast except when executing a turn.

3. **Turns**
   a. Intermediate turns within each stroke shall conform to the turn rules for that stroke, except that in the freestyle turn, the swimmer must return to the breast before any kick or stroke. (This does not apply for Individual Medley in MCSL, since there are no intermediate turns in Individual Medley events).
   b. The turns when changing from one stroke to another shall conform to the finish rules for the stroke just completed, and shall be as follows:

      (1) **Butterfly to backstroke** - The swimmer must touch as described in II. 5. above. Once a legal touch has been made, the swimmer may turn in any manner, but the shoulders must be at or past the vertical toward the back when the swimmer leaves the wall.

      (2) **Backstroke to breaststroke** - The swimmer must touch the wall while on the back. Once a legal touch has been made the swimmer may turn in any manner, but the shoulders must be at or past the vertical toward the breast when the swimmer leaves the wall and the prescribed breaststroke form must be attained prior to the first arm stroke.

      (3) **Breaststroke to Freestyle** - The swimmer must touch as described in I. 4 above. Once a legal touch has been made, the swimmer may turn in any manner and must return to the breast before any kick or stroke.

4. **Finish** - The swimmer shall have finished the race when any part of his/her person touches the wall after the prescribed distance.

5. **Common violations in IM.**
   a. Swimmers must comply with finish rules at the end of each stroke. Since the finish and turn is identical for breaststroke and butterfly, this is only of consequence for backstroke. In IM, the swimmer must complete the backstroke portion of the event as s/he would for a finish, *that is, on the back.*
   b. Be aware that the freestyle leg of the IM is any style other than Butterfly, Breaststroke or Backstroke. During the freestyle leg of the Individual Medley, the swimmer must be at or past vertical toward the breast before any kick or stroke and remain at or past vertical toward the breast during the swim.
   c. All other violations are as for the individual strokes.

VI. RELAYS

1. **Freestyle Relay** – Four swimmers on each team swim the prescribed distance using any desired stroke(s). Freestyle finish rules apply.

2. **Medley Relay** - Four swimmers on each team, each to swim one-fourth of the prescribed distance in the following order: first, backstroke; second, breaststroke; third, butterfly; and fourth, freestyle. Rules pertaining to each stroke used as described in V. (Individual Medley) shall govern where applicable. At the end of each leg, the finish rule for each stroke applies in each case. *Be aware that the freestyle leg of the medley relay is any style other than Butterfly, Breaststroke or Backstroke. During the freestyle leg of the Medley Relay, the swimmer must be at or past vertical toward the breast before any kick or stroke and remain at or past vertical toward the breast during the swim.*

3. **Rules pertaining to relay races**

   a. No swimmer shall swim more than one leg in any relay event.

   b. In relay races a swimmer other than the first swimmer shall not start until his/her teammate has concluded his/her leg.

   c. Any relay team member and his/her relay team shall be disqualified from a race if a team member other than the swimmer designated to swim that leg enters the pool in the area where the race is being conducted before all swimmers of all teams have finished the race. Exception: When an in-water start is required or such start is approved by the Referee.

   d. Each relay team member shall leave the water promptly upon finishing his/her leg, except the last member. NOTE: There is no time limit on "promptly". *If a swimmer exits before interfering with another swimmer there should be no violation.*

e. In relay exchanges, the team of a swimmer whose feet have lost touch with the deck or whose body has lost contact with the wall (for in-water relay exchanges) before his/her preceding teammate touches the wall shall be disqualified. This rule falls under the jurisdiction of the relay take-off judges for dual meets, division relay carnival meets, and division championship meets.

f. A swimmer may not take more than one step during the forward start of his/her relay leg to get to their starting position. Moving the second foot to the same position as the first foot is not considered as having taken a second step. This rule falls under the jurisdiction of the starter for dual meets and division championship meets, and the starter and chief judge for division relay carnival meets.

g. The 175 meter graduated freestyle relay shall be swum in the following order: 2 lengths 9-10 year olds, 2 lengths 11-12 year olds, 2 lengths 13-14 year olds, and 1 length 8 and under.

h. The 250 meter crescendo freestyle relay shall be swum in the following order: 1 length 8 and under, 2 lengths 11-12 year olds, 4 lengths 15-18 year olds, 2 lengths 13-14 year olds, and 1 length 9-10 year olds. Except at the All Star Relay meet, the 250 meter crescendo freestyle relay shall start in the shallow end with an in-water forward start.

i. All 100 meter medley events shall start in the shallow end. The mixed 8 and under freestyle relay shall start in the deep end. There must be two in-water starts for each 100 meter relay. All swimmers starting their leg of a relay in the shallow end must use an in-water start. This rule does not apply to the All Star Relay meet.

j. The 14 and Under Graduated Medley Relay is comprised of one swimmer from each of the 8 and under, 9-10, 11-12 and 13-14 age groups. Each swimmer swims one 25 meter length of back, breast, fly or free. Any age group may swim any relay leg, but all four age groups must be represented.

k. For pools with no shallow end (4 feet or deeper at both ends), a "shallow" end must be designated.

Starting

Responsibilities of the Starter

An electronic starting horn and an electronic strobe signal is the preferred starting device.

1. The Starter shall stand on the side of the pool within approximately five meters of the starting end of the pool. The starting unit shall be in the general vicinity of the start end backstroke flags. The visual starting signal shall be clearly visible to all the swimmers and timers. The starting signal shall be audible to all starting positions.

2. Upon signal from the Referee, the Starter assumes full control of the swimmers until a fair start has been achieved.

3. Optional instructions include:
   a. Event, stroke and distance
   b. For backstroke starts, the command, "Place your feet"
   c. "Stand" command to release swimmers if field is unsettled

4. At the commencement of each heat, the Referee shall signal to the swimmers by a short series of whistles (four or five) to remove all clothing except for swimwear, followed by a long whistle indicating that they should take their positions near the edge of the pool and remain there. In backstroke and medley relay events, at the Referee's first long whistle the swimmers shall promptly enter the water and at the second long whistle shall return without undue delay to the starting end.

5. When the swimmers and officials are ready, the Referee shall signal with an outstretched arm to the Starter that the swimmers are under the Starter's control.

6. On the Starter's command "Take Your Marks", the swimmers shall immediately assume their starting position with at least one foot at the edge of the pool. When all swimmers are stationary, the Starter shall give the starting signal.

7. Swimmers may start in the water but the swimmer or coach should notify the Referee of their intentions before the event.

Starting Rules

Note: Towels draped over the pool edge are permitted at the start. Towels should be removed from the pool edge before the swimmer returns to the starting end; however, failure to remove a towel is not a valid reason for the swimmer's disqualification. Starting in the water should be allowed if requested by the swimmer or coach before the race.

A swimmer shall be disqualified for an illegal starting position at the start if the swimmer moves from a legal starting position to an illegal starting position immediately prior to or after the "take your marks" command provided that the illegal starting position exists when the signal to start the race is given. Enforcement of the correct starting position is the responsibility of the Starter or the Stroke and Turn Judges.

The Forward Start

The Referee issues a short series of whistle chirps after the last swimmer has touched (also to get ready for the first event) to alert the next heat to get ready. When the Referee is ready to continue, the Referee blows a single long whistle blast. This signals the swimmers to step up to the edge of the pool (if they haven't already done so) or into the water with one hand in contact with the deck. When the Referee is ready, he/she signals the Starter by extending an arm towards the starter. The Starter upon receiving this clearance from the Referee determines that

the swimmers are ready and then directs the swimmers to "Take Your Marks." Upon hearing "Take Your Marks", swimmers must immediately respond by assuming a starting position with at least one foot to the front of the deck. Sufficient time should follow "Take Your Marks" to enable swimmers to assume starting positions, but no swimmer shall be in motion immediately before the starting signal is given.

The In-water Forward Start

Swimmers shall start in the water with at least one hand on the wall or on the deck. To initiate the start, the swimmer shall push off the wall, but shall not push off the pool bottom. At least one of the swimmers' feet shall be in contact with the wall after the "Take Your Marks" command. A backstroke start may not be used. Towels may not be used for in-water forward starts.

The Back Start

The Referee issues a short series of whistle chirps after the last swimmer has touched (also to get ready for the first event) to alert the next heat to get ready. When the Referee is ready to continue, the Referee blows a single long whistle blast. This signals the swimmers to step into the pool.

One long whistle blast is then issued to signal the swimmers to get into position. The swimmers shall line up in the water facing the starting end, with both hands placed on the edge, on the gutter or on one assistant's legs no higher than mid-calf. The heels of the person providing such assistance shall not extend beyond the edge of the pool. The swimmer's feet may be placed in any position on the vertical surface of the pool. Standing on, or curling toes over, the edge of the pool, the gutter or a skimmer is not permitted at any time.

A false start may be charged to any swimmer who fails to maintain his/her feet and/or hands in a legal position after an appropriate warning.

NOTE: When assistance (legs) is provided, the grip should be attained at the ankles, no higher than the mid-calf, for safety purposes. The Starter and/or Referee should ensure that the assistant giving legs is physically big enough not to be at risk of being pulled into the water by the swimmer.

False Starts:

1. Any swimmer initiating a start before the starting signal has been given shall be disqualified. If the starting signal sounds before the disqualification is declared, the race shall continue and the swimmer or swimmers shall be disqualified upon completion of the race. *If the starting signal sounds and there is a recall, no swimmer shall be charged with a false start.*

2. When a swimmer does not respond promptly to the command "Take Your Marks" or false starts before the starting signal is given, the Starter shall immediately release all swimmers with a "Stand" command on which the swimmers may stand up. Any swimmer who enters the water or backstroker who leaves the starting area shall be charged with a false start,

except that a swimmer who would otherwise be charged with the false start may be relieved of the charge if the false start was caused by the swimmer's reaction to the "Stand" command.

3. In backstroke or medley relay events a false start may be charged to any swimmer who fails to maintain his/her feet and/or hands in a legal position after the first warning.

4. A swimmer can be charged with a false start by the Starter only if the Referee has also observed the violation and confirms that the violation occurred.

5. If a swimmer is disqualified for a false start and the starting signal is not given, the swimmer shall be permitted to swim the event as an exhibition swim.

Comments on False Starts.

The rules detailed above indicate that a swimmer initiating a start before the starting signal is guilty of a false start. However, the swimmer may be relieved of the penalty under certain circumstances.

Suggestions on the Starting Rules. Swimmers entering the water or backstrokers leaving the starting area prior to a starting signal may be relieved of a false start if:

1. They are in motion as a result of a "Stand" command".
   - Remember "stationary" cannot be absolute. We are mainly concerned with upper body motion.
   - Many swimmers adjust the position of feet or hips after the command "take your marks". This is considered Non-Disqualifiable Motion and is not a cause for disqualification.

2. They enter the water due to loss of balance when trying to respond to a "Stand" command".
   - The rules do not require the swimmer to be able to stand up after assuming a starting position.
   - Swimmers may need to dive or jump away from the starting wall to avoid striking the wall or entering the water at a dangerous angle. In accordance with good safety practice, coaches will be encouraged to teach swimmers to do this.

3. They enter the water because of a sound or camera flash.

4. They enter the water due to loss of balance when attempting to take their mark. It is not the intent to disqualify swimmers who may have slipped on the deck surface and lost their balance as a result of placing their feet for the start.

5. A swimmer should be coached to assume a stationary starting position upon the command, "Take Your Marks", and *go at the next sound.*

6. The Referee must independently observe and confirm the Starter's observation for dual confirmation. If the Starter calls a false start on lane 3 and the Referee was watching lane 6, the Referee cannot concur and no false start can be charged.

7. If the Referee or Starter feel a generally poor start has occurred the field may be recalled and if so there will be no false starts declared.

Guidance for In-Water Starts

We will continue the use of In-Water starts for regular season relays and other races as necessary. Please apply common sense to ensure we have safe and equitable starts and take-offs.

- In-Water Starts shall be used for pools shallower than 4 feet at the start end.
- Swimmers shall step in feet first at the long whistle (like backstroke).
- Second long whistle to get swimmers to the wall.
- Starting position is one hand on the wall or deck, and one or both feet on the wall.
- Wait for swimmers to become stationary after "Take Your Marks".
- At the start the swimmers will push off the wall.

Relay in-water starts and exchanges:

- If an event in a Relay Carnival designates an in-water start for certain swimmers then that must be observed no matter the physical properties of the pool in which the competition is taking place.
- For relay exchanges, swimmers should step in after the start or after the swimmer from the other end has entered the water (getting in early is not a DQ unless interfering with a swimmer).
- The swimmer should observe the swimmer coming at them and move accordingly.
- At the beginning of the exchange the outgoing swimmer will have one or both feet on the wall. The outgoing swimmer may be in motion, as long as one or both feet remain in contact with the wall. There is no requirement to have a hand in contact with the wall or deck at the start of or during a relay exchange.
- Some part of the outgoing swimmer must be in contact with the wall or deck until the incoming swimmer has touched.
- The outgoing swimmer may not push off from the bottom of the pool.
- To judge the take-off, the Take-off Judges shall watch the outgoing swimmer; when the outgoing swimmer loses contact with the wall or the deck, check that the incoming swimmer has touched.
- This may be difficult to see from the side - benefit of the doubt always to the swimmer.
- Stroke & Turn Judges will be responsible to make sure swimmers push off the wall and not the bottom. This is not a Take-off Judge call.

Other things not permitted for in-water starts:

- Backstroke starts will not be used for in-water start or relay exchange. For starts these are forward starts (not back), for relay take offs the outgoing swimmer needs to watch the incoming swimmer and move accordingly.

- Legs will not be allowed for forward in water starts or relay exchanges. They really are not needed for a forward start, and it would impede the outgoing swimmer in moving to avoid the incoming swimmer.
- Towels will not be allowed for forward in-water starts or relay exchanges. They are not needed for a forward in-water start, they would tend to drift out and obscure observation, and make movement to avoid the incoming swimmer more difficult. It would also make it difficult to tell when the incoming swimmer has actually touched.
- Sitting on edge of the pool for take offs will not be allowed. This would probably result in a form of forward start off the deck and we do not want any form of deck start.

Other Responsibilities of the Starter

During relay exchanges, the Starter is responsible for ensuring that swimmers entering the water from the deck take no more than one step to bring them to their starting position. Running starts are not permitted. The Starter shall also ensure that no individual aids another swimmer by pushing them into the water at the start of a race or relay leg. This applies to all starts and relay exchanges for swimmers entering the water from the deck during dual meets and Divisionals. During Relay Carnivals, the Starter shall observe starts and relay exchanges for swimmers entering the water from the deck that take place on his/her side of the pool (the Starter does not need to observe in-water relay exchanges). The Starter shall raise his/her hand if he/she witnesses a violation of these rules.

The Referee may ask the Starter to record the order of finish.

Disabled Swimmers

The Referee may allow for an in the water start and certain modifications of the rules, based on the disability in question. It is the responsibility of the disabled swimmer, via his coach and team representative, to provide appropriate personal and medical information to the Referee, and to bring someone to assist, if needed. Here are MCSL guidelines:

1. Modified starts for hearing impairment.

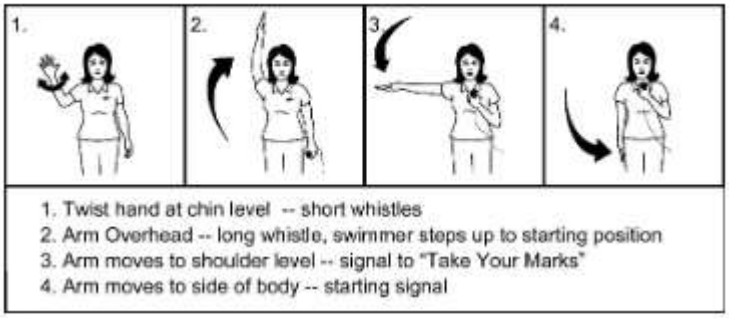
    a. The starting console shall be positioned so that it is easily visible by the impaired swimmer. It may also be necessary to modify lane assignments to accomplish this.
    b. The Starter shall provide hand signals at the start.

    For Forward Starts:

    Twist hand at chin level – short whistles
    Arm overhead – swimmers step up to edge of pool
    Arm moves to shoulder level – signal to “Take Your Marks”
    Arm moves to side of body – starting signal

Arm raised overhead (at any time after “Take Your Marks” and prior to starting signal) – swimmer released from Take Your Marks command

The figure below is taken from the USA Swimming Rulebook:



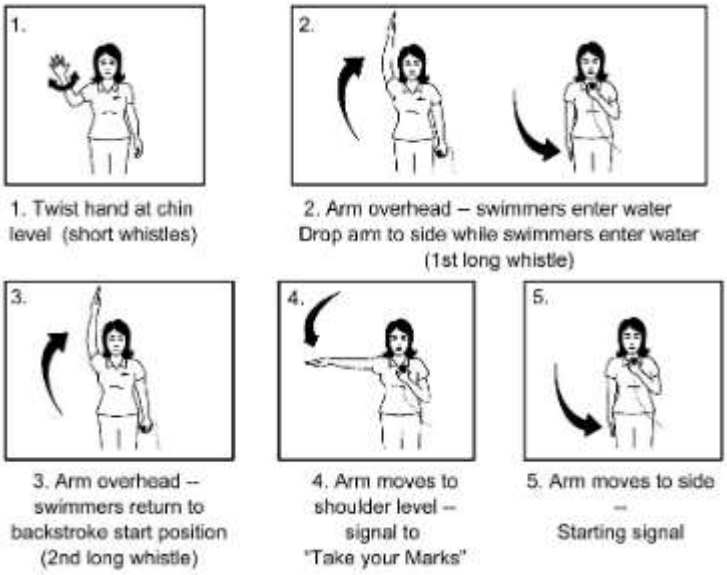
How to release swimmers from “Take Your Marks”

For Back Starts:

Twist hand at chin level – short whistles
Arm overhead – swimmers enter water. Drop arm to side while swimmers enter water.
Arm overhead – swimmers return to backstroke start position
Arm moves to shoulder level – signal to “Take Your Marks”
Arm moves to side of body – starting signal

Arm raised overhead (at any time after “Take Your Marks” and prior to starting signal) – swimmer released from Take Your Marks command

The figure below is taken from the USA Swimming Rulebook:



c. Allow the athlete's assistant(s) on the deck or in the water to assist with the start.

2. Observing stroke and turns for physically disabled swimmers

   a. Referee and Stroke and Turn Judge should follow the general rule that, if a part of the body is absent or cannot be used; it is not judged. If it is used during the stroke or kick, it should be judged in accordance with the MCSL Rules and Regulations.

Judgment should be made on the actual rule not on the swimmer's technique. For example: the breaststroke swimmer with one arm or leg shorter than the other, may have a non-symmetrical kick but as long as the arm or leg action is simultaneous, it would meet that portion of the rule.

Note: Please review the complete section regarding disabled swimmers in the USA Swimming Rules & Regulations, if possible, to familiarize yourself more completely with Guidelines For Officiating Swimmers With A Disability. These procedures are recommended, not required. If the swimmer, coach or parent would like to use some other method, you should accommodate them if possible.

Conclusion

Feedback on clinics and on this Official's Guide is always appreciated. The MCSL Clinics Committee is also always happy to answer questions that may come up during the season. Please send feedback or questions to clinics@mcsl.org.

Have a great swim season!