

# HANDBOOK FOR MCSL SWIMMING OFFICIALS

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## 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, if you prefer, 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, the greater your exposure to sources of information, the better official 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.

## WARMUP 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 only 1) during an event, 2) during a supervised warm-up, 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 Marshall, who, for this purpose may be a coach, must monitor each sprint lane along with the rest of their swimmers.

## RECENT RULE CHANGES

Each team may now enter two (2) relay teams in events 3 & 4.

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. 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. A Referee should ensure that this process is well defined during his or her meetings with coaches and officials prior to the meet.

## **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 more experienced officials or from MCSL Clinic Instructors (telephone numbers are in the Handbook).
  - 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 any one 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 swimmer except 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 club 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, MCSL patch, and white rubber-soled shoes.
  - 2. Women: navy blue skirt, slacks or shorts, white shirt, MCSL patch, and white rubber-soled shoes.
  - 3. Look neat and well groomed. An official's patch alone won't suffice!

## **REFEREE**

### **Authority and Responsibility:**

The Referee:

Shall have full authority over all officials and shall assign and their positions and jurisdictions. Referee should hold a briefing before the beginning of the meet with starter and 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.

Shall also 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 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. See page 22 of the Officials Guide or Article 105 in the 2006 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. Under extreme circumstances, the Referee may call a false start unilaterally (without dual confirmation). This is an extreme situation. See comments on false starts under Starter.  
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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, at 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 the 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 eliminate. 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 and Officials' Handbook. 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 starter 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. Advise team reps to come to referee with any problems.
  - c. Determine who will be acknowledging disqualifications.
  - d. 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 and Turn Judges and Starter. (For events 3 & 4 Assign Relay Side Take-off Judges from lanes 1 & 6. Assign Lane Take-off Judges to be stationed over lanes 2-5. If at all possible utilize same lane relay Take-off judges for events 49 & 50, using Stroke & Turn from the starting end as side Take-off judges.
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 functioning properly at all times 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 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 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.

9. Assign Relay Takeoff Judges

Take-Off Judges shall station themselves (after the first swimmer has started) alongside the second swimmer so that they can clearly see both the touch of the incoming swimmer as the latter leaves the deck or the wall. The Judge 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 will not be responsible for determining if the swimmer pushed off from the wall or the bottom.

- 1. One judge located at the start end, on each lane (from opposing team).
- 2. One judge located at the start end, beside each outside lane, with divided responsibility for lanes near them.
- 3. Observe the feet of outgoing swimmer leave the wall, then shift gaze to observe the hands of the incoming swimmer for the touch.
- 4. In case of illegal takeoff, no signal is given. 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.

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.

- b) Stroke & Turn Judges:
  1. Where to stand and rotation system. S&T judges shall be at the ends of the pool.
  2. Review recent rule changes.
  3. Review rules for the strokes.
  4. Review jurisdiction of each judge.
  5. 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?
  6. All DQs to be reported to Referee and signed by Referee, S&T judge, and coach of disqualified swimmer or other identified team representative before slip goes to scorers. This should be done before the next event or heat begins.
- c) 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.
- d) 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.
- e) Computer table:
 

Check at the outset to assure 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 scheduled start of meet. 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. For specific rules on scratches and substitutions see page 47 in the MCSL Handbook.

#### 12. Meet with Coaches:

1. Respond to any questions coaches may have.
2. Determine if there are any special need swimmers relative to starts.
3. Advise that all problems be addressed with referee.
4. Advise about placement of backstroke flags.

#### **During the meet:**

1. Assume and maintain complete control.
2. Watch start and entire race closely - Supervise officials. Referee may call obvious infractions but should not “over judge” any quadrant. Referee must confirm false start. Best position is usually next to Starter so the Referee can see what the Starter sees. *It is much more important to be in position to observe starts than to get sweep of finish.*
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. 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.

5. Show fairness and impartiality to all competitors and remember that by doing so you protect all swimmers rather than penalize a few.
6. 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!
7. Have fun, and try to see that everyone else does too.

**After the Meet:**

Thank officials for their help. Check with scorers table and remain on site until all scoring is completed. It is a good idea to use this time to check your recorded DQ's with those on the results. 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**

MCSL 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, or 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 "Chiefs" category. A Chief Judge will be responsible for the following:

- a) 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. It is recommended that the Chief Judge be a certified Referee.
- b) Other duties for the Chief Judge as the Referee sees fit.
- c) 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 were they positioned. Once the Chief Judge has approved the disqualification, he or she will take it to the Referee for final approval and sign off.
- d) The Chief Judge may fill in for a Stroke & Turn Judge in an emergency.
- e) The Chief Judge will not make Stroke & Turn calls, or any other DQ. If the Chief Judge observes an infraction, the Chief Judge should talk to the Referee.

MCSL recommends the use of a Chief Judge at all Divisional and All Star meets. The Chief Judge may be used in MCSL dual meets if team reps decide to do so and appropriate certified individuals are available. Any individual serving in the capacity of Chief Judge must be certified as an MCSL Referee with at least one-year experience in the Stroke & Turn position. The home team will supply the Chief Judge when used in MCSL dual 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 reflection 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 leaving the pool before the end of 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 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. This should 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, a 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. Assure fairness and equity by observing all swimmers uniformly.

## **RULES FOR SWIMMING THE STROKES**

These are the MCSL rules, as presented in the 2007 USA Swimming Rules and Regulations with modifications for MCSL for Starts and Backstroke.

**Introduction.** 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** - From the beginning of the first arm stroke after the start and after each turn, the body shall be kept on the breast. It is not permitted to roll onto the back at any time. 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 and in the same horizontal plane without alternating movement. The hands shall be pushed forward together from the breast, on, under, or over the water. The elbows shall be under the water except for the final stroke before the turn, during

the turn and before 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 hipline, 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 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, a single downward butterfly kick followed by a breaststroke kick is permitted while wholly submerged. Following which all movements of the legs shall be simultaneous and in the same horizontal plane without alternating movement. The feet must be turned outward during the propulsive part of the kick. A scissors, flutter or downward butterfly kick is 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 simultaneously at, above, or below the water level. 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.
5. **Common violations in breaststroke:**
  - a. Sidestroke or scissors kick (any alternating movement).
  - b. Multiple dolphin or flutter 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. Arms not in same horizontal plane at the beginning of the first arm pull following start or turn.
  - e. Body not at or past the vertical towards the breast when the feet leave the wall after a turn.
  - f. Hand touches not 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. **BUTTERFLY STROKE**

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 him 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. 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 swimmer's body shall be kept on the breast. Both arms must be brought forward over the water and pulled back simultaneously.

3. **Kick** - All up and down movements of the legs and feet must be simultaneous. The position of the legs and 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 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 simultaneously at, above or below the water surface.
6. **Common violations in butterfly:**
  - a. Hand touches not 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 his 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 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. By that point, the head must have broken the surface of the water.
3. **Turns** - The turn requires that some part of the swimmers body contact the end wall. After the swimmer's head has passed the backstroke flag, prior to the turn, the swimmers 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 shall assume a position on the back before the feet leave the wall.

4. **Finish** - Upon the finish of the race, the swimmer must touch the wall while on the back. The body may be submerged at the touch.

#### 5. **Common Violations in Backstroke:**

- a. Failure to return to at or past vertical toward back before 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 them self 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. 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.
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. Obtaining assistance by grasping or pulling on lane lines or side of the pool.

### 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 each stroke.
3. **Turns**
  - A. The intermediate turns within each stroke shall conform to the turn rules for that stroke.
  - 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:

- (a) **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.
  - (b) **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 form must be attained prior to the first arm stroke.
  - (c) **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.
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 stroke other than Butterfly, Breaststroke or Backstroke.*
  - c. All other violations are as for the individual strokes.

## VI. RELAYS.

1. **Freestyle Relay** - 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 continuously in the following order: backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly, and freestyle. Rules pertaining to each stroke 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 IM is any stroke other than Butterfly, Breaststroke or Backstroke.*
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 shall jump into or enter the pool in the area where the race is being conducted before all swimmers of all teams have finished the race.

- 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 races, the team of a swimmer whose feet have lost touch with the deck (for Forward Starts) or whose body has lost contact with the wall (for in-water relay starts) before his/her preceding teammate touches the wall shall be disqualified. A swimmer may take not more than one step during the forward start of his/her relay leg to bring him/her to the edge of the pool.
- f. The 250 meter crescendo shall start in the shallow end with an in-water forward start. All 100 meter medley events shall start in the shallow end. Mixed 8 and under 100 meter freestyle relay may start in the shallow or the deep end. All swimmers starting their leg of the relay in the shallow end must use an in-water start. For those pools with no shallow end (4 feet or deeper in both ends), a shallow end must be designated. There must be two in-water starts for each 100 meter relay and one in – water start for the 250 meter crescendo ( first swimmer in the shallow or so designated end). This rule does not apply to the All-Star Relay meets.

## **STARTING**

### **RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE STARTER**

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

1. The Starter shall stand within ten feet of the starting end of the pool. The visual starting signal shall be clearly visible to all of 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 mark", 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.

### **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, directs the swimmers to "take your mark," 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 mark" 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**

For starts in water depth of less than 4 feet, and for all relay take offs at the opposite end of the pool, 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.

For in-water starts at the start of a race, at least one of the swimmers' feet shall be in contact with the wall after the "Take Your Mark" command.

A backstroke start may not be used.

Towels may not be used for in-water 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. Prior to the command "take your mark" and until the feet leave the wall at the starting signal, the swimmer's heels shall be in contact with the surface of the water. 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 appropriate warning. NOTE: A swimmer who curls toes over an edge after the starting signal commits a stroke violation, not a starting violation and may only be disqualified by a Stroke & Turn Judge.

NOTE: When assistance (legs) is provided, the grip should be attained at the ankles, no higher than the calf, for safety purposes.

### **False Starts:**

- (1) Any swimmer starting 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 mark" or false starts before the starting signal is given, the Starter shall immediately release all swimmers with command "Stand" on which the swimmers may stand up. Any swimmer who enters the water or backstroke 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 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 observed the violation and confirms that the violation occurred.
- (5) A swimmer shall not be disqualified for an illegal starting position at the start if the race is permitted to proceed without recall. Enforcement of the correct starting position is the responsibility of the Starter, who, with the concurrence of the Referee, may impose the appropriate penalty for violation before the starting signal is given.
- (6) 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 who is in motion 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 the command “Stand Up”.
  - Remember “stationary” cannot be absolute. We are mainly concerned with forward motion.
  - Many swimmers adjust the position of feet or hips after the command “take your mark”. This is considered Non-Disqualifiable Motion and they should not be disqualified
2. They enter the water due to loss of balance when trying to respond to the command “stand up”.
  - 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 as a result 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 mark”, 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 may be no false starts declared.

### **Guidance for In-Water Starts**

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

- Starts for pools shallower than 4 feet at the Start end:
- Swimmers shall step in feet first at the long whistle (like back stroke).
- 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 the take your mark.
- At the start the swimmers will push off the wall.

Relay in-water take-offs:

- 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 interference 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 hand on the wall or deck, and one or both feet on the wall. The outgoing swimmer may be in motion, and may release the hand so long as one or both feet remain in contact with the wall.
- 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 should (will) 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:

- Back stroke start 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 forward 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 pool for take off 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 forward start.

## **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. When the Referee directs the swimmers to step up to the edge of the pool for the forward start or step into the pool for the back start, the starter shall immediately raise one arm over his/her head. At the command "Take your mark", s/he lowers left arm to waist level; the starting device (electronic strobe light) provides the start signal. (NOTE: Hand is NOT lowered at the starting signal - the flash or light alone is the starting signal).
  - 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 breast stroke 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 Officiating Swimmers With Disabilities. 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**

The MCSL Rules Committee reviews the MCSL rules annually and makes changes in the best interest of the league. We rely on our certified officials for input on ways to improve our Guide and MCSL Handbook. Please send your comments to [rules@mcsl.org](mailto:rules@mcsl.org).