

## **Guidelines for Officiating Swimmers With Disabilities**

Definition – A disability is defined as a *permanent* physical or mental impairment. Temporary conditions (like a broken arm) are not recognized as disabilities.

Responsibilities – The swimmer (or swimmer's coach or other representative) is responsible for notifying the referee prior to the competition of any disability. The swimmer or coach is responsible for providing any assistant or equipment if required. The Referee is responsible for inquiring (at the official's meeting or before the meeting) about any disabled swimmers with special needs. The referee is further responsible for determining what modifications will be required and for instructing the Starter and Stroke & Turn officials as to the accommodations to be made for any disabled swimmer.

Allowable Modifications – Some of the modifications which the Referee may make to accommodate a disabled swimmer are:

1. A change in starting position.
2. Reassignment of lanes within a heat (e.g., exchanging lanes 1 and 6 in a six-lane pool).
3. Allowing the swimmer to have an assistant on the deck to assist with the start.
4. Flotation devices are not permitted at any time. However, prosthetic devices may be used to replace a missing body part as long as the device does not provide a competitive advantage to the swimmer (e.g., a device that is similar in size and shape to a human foot may be used, but a swimming /diving fin would be unacceptable.)
5. A swimmer with a cardio-pulmonary defect who must stop part way through the course to stand and rest before finishing the swim shall be relieved of the "no standing" rule on breaststroke and butterfly.
6. Other allowable modifications are described in the following sections under type of disability.

### Blind and Visually Impaired Swimmers

Start – With an audible starting system, no modification is required. However, the swimmer may need assistance and extra time getting onto the starting block or up to the edge of the deck. If requested, a kneeling, sitting or in-water start is acceptable.

Turns and Finishes – It is permitted to have a "tapper", which is a pole with a soft-tipped end. The swimmer is tapped with the tapper as he/she approaches the end wall as notification of the impending touch or turn. Sound devices shall not be used.

Relay Take Offs – A physical touch may be required to signal the relay swimmer when his/her teammate has touched the wall. The touch may not aid the swimmer's take off.

### Deaf and Hard of Hearing Swimmers

Start – A visual starting signal may be required. This may include a remote strobe light or a Starter's arm signals. If a remote strobe light is used, it shall be placed in a position where the swimmer can clearly see it without having to turn his/her head in an awkward position. If a Starter's arm signal is used, the specific signal shall be made aware to the swimmer prior to the competition. The Referee may reassign lanes within the swimmer's heat so that the strobe light on the start module or the Starter's arm signal can be more readily seen. Any necessary lane reassignments shall be

symmetrical (e.g., switching lanes 1 and 6 in a six-lane pool). Also acceptable (but not recommended) is to permit an assistant to stand directly behind the deaf swimmer in order to tap the swimmer on the back when the audible starting horn is heard. If the assistant causes the deaf swimmer to leave his mark early, the swimmer shall be charged with a false start.

Turns, Finishes, and Relay Take Offs – No modifications are required.

### Swimmers with Physical Disabilities

Start – The swimmer may need assistance and extra time getting onto the starting block or up to the front edge of the deck at the start.

Forward Start – The swimmer must face forward toward the course at the start, but the body may be in a standing, kneeling, or sitting position on the deck. If requested, an in-water start is acceptable. If an in-water starting position is used, the swimmer must face forward and hold on to the starting grip or end wall with one hand. If the swimmer cannot use a hand to hold on, then an assistant may be used, or the swimmer may use some other part of the body to maintain contact with the wall.

Backstroke Start -- The swimmer may not be able to hold on to the backstroke grips, wall or gutter for a backstroke start; if so, the requirement that both hands be in contact with the grips or end wall shall be waived, and the swimmer may use an assistant or another body part to maintain contact with the wall at the start.

Stroke and Kick – If a part of the body is absent or cannot be used, it shall not be judged during a swim. However, if a body part is used during a swim it shall be judged in accordance with NWAL rules.

Turns and Finishes – Touches shall be judged in the same manner as strokes and kicks; i.e., on the basis of arm(s) and/or hand(s) that are present and that the swimmer can actually use. In breaststroke and butterfly, the swimmer must reach forward as if attempting a simultaneous two hand touch. When a swimmer has two arms of different lengths, only the longer arm must touch the wall, but both arms must stretch forward simultaneously. If both arms are missing, the swimmer may touch the wall with any part of the upper body.

Relays – The starting position modifications described previously may also be used for relay swimmers. Relay swimmers who cannot exit the water immediately after their swim may be allowed to remain in the lane until all relays have finished so long as they do not interfere with the other swimmers or the timing equipment.

### Mentally Impaired Swimmers

Start – The swimmer may need assistance and extra time getting onto the starting block or up to the edge of the deck. If requested, a kneeling, sitting or in-water start is acceptable. Patience and clarity in communicating instructions is required of the Starter.

Strokes, Kicks, Turns and Finishes – No modifications are required.

Relay Take Offs – No modifications are required.

