

Take a look at your new rule book and see if you immediately notice some changes. Besides several rule changes for both swimming and diving the NFHS Swimming and Diving Rules Committee made some changes in the layout of the 2003-2004 Rules Book. In order to make the Situations and Rulings section more relevant to the referenced rule, the corresponding situations and rulings now follow the rule rather than being placed at the end of the rules. Committee members felt that it would be easier for officials to reference the situations and rulings by placing them closer to the rules.

Also, with a focus on safety, the Communicable Diseases Procedure and the Guidelines For Meet Warm-up have been moved the front of the book. It was the intent of the committee that by changing the placement of these pages it would make them more visible, easier to find and encourage both coaches and officials to use them. In addition, the NFHS Mission Statement has been added to the front of the book.

As for rule changes, the committee made several changes in both swimming and diving dealing with the issue of safety. In swimming, language has now been added in Rule 8-1-1 Note and Rule 8-1-2 describing the correct, and now required, method of entering the water for both the forward start (when an in-water start is required) and the backstroke start. Most injuries in swimming occur from unsafe entries into the water whether from controlled starts from platforms, from the deck for in-water starts or during entry for practice. Requiring swimmers to now step into the water feet first as described in the rule changes should further minimize this risk. In order to enforce this procedure Rule 8-1-3d

now gives discretion to the referee so that an infraction resulting in the disqualification of the swimmer MAY be called for not stepping into the water feet first for an in-water start.

Water entry is further reinforced in Points of Emphasis where it is noted that except when starting from a platform, the swimmer shall step into the water feet-first anytime he/she enters the pool. Also, as noted under Points of Emphasis, the same standards and procedures for both water entry and meet warm-up should be followed whether during practice or during meets.

As with any sport, swimming is no different, changes in technology continue to be implemented and incorporated with the hope of making the conduct of the sport better. An example would be the use of computers and automatic timing systems. When used properly, these technologies allow the swimmer to get more accurate times and finish placing. However, when something goes wrong there needs to be a procedure in place to allow the inaccuracies to be corrected. One such procedure is described in Rule 6 and was introduced in the 2002-2003 Rule Book. As noted in Points of Emphasis, this procedure may be applied uniformly to provide a consistent method of integrating a backup system. As required in Rule 6-4-1 backup times shall be adjusted and integrated into the accurate primary times before determining official times and places, however, the method used to do this is left to the state association. The important point is that the method work and that it be applied consistently association wide. The Rules Committee has provided such a method in Rule 6.

Another new technology related to automatic timing systems is automatic relay judging. Although not in widespread use due the high cost, it is available in some facilities and this year the Rules Committee added language in Rule 6-3-3 to allow the use of this equipment. No operational procedure has been adopted by the committee and this determination has been left to the state associations for now.

The last rule change for swimming this year deals with the warning signal that is given to the swimmer in the 500 yard/meter freestyle when he/she has 2 lengths plus 5 yards remaining to swim in the race. Traditionally, the most common method was the discharging of a 22 caliber blank pistol above the lead swimmer. In recent years, however, there has been a great deal of concern expressed to the Rules Committee about continuing to use the blank pistol on a high school campus. Although the type of sounding device to be used is not specified in the rule book, the choice of an alternative device to the pistol has been limited to a something that could be discharged (sounded) over the lane of the lead swimmer. In order to expand the choices of sounding devices available to the official but not preclude the use of the pistol, the committee modified Rule 4-1-3 by removing the requirement that the sound must be over the lane and substituted “for” the lead swimmer instead. Now the starting horn, for example, may be used from the side of the pool as well as the more traditional devices e.g., as a pistol or bell. The Rules Committee strongly discourages the use of a whistle unless absolutely necessary since it is used as a signal to control the meet and may cause the swimmer to inadvertently stop the race. It is always good practice to notify the swimmers or team

captains before the meet of the type sounding device to be used, especially if it something nonstandard like a whistle.

Diving was not without rule changes this year and one of the changes deals with affording divers the same opportunity to withdraw from competition as swimmers. For several years swimmers have been allowed to withdraw from competition in a preliminary or final event with a declared false start. Starting this year divers are being given the equivalent of a declared false start by allowing them to withdraw from a preliminary or final round of diving by notifying the referee at a specified time. Language to this effect has been added to Rule 9-3 as Article 4. The existing Article 4 and articles above have been renumbered. Notice that diving is also referenced in Rule 3-2-2 pertaining to declared false starts. In this respect divers and swimmers are now being treated consistently within the structure of a meet.

Eight new positions for dives and corresponding degree of difficulty (dd) have been added to the dive table on page 54 of the 2003-2004 Rules Book. They are 103A, 2.0; 104A, 2.6; 106B, 3.2; 304A, 2.9; 402A, 2.0; 404B, 3.0; 413B, 2.9; 5111C, 1.6. These changes reflect the Committee's continuing effort to keep dive dd's consistent with those in USA Diving. Don't forget that subject to Rule 9-4-7 only dives listed on the dive table may be performed under NFHS rules.

Many schools and institutions now or will have access to automatic judging and scoreboards for diving. These scoreboards usually have the ability to display the score

awarded by each diving judge making the verbal announcement (now required) of the scores redundant or unnecessary. Following the practice of incorporating new technology into our sport, the Rules Committee added the language in Rule 9-6-3b to allow the use of scoreboards. Judges' scores shall now be announced and/or displayed.

The last rule change in diving again deals with a safety issue. There are occasions when the diving referee has reason to suspect that a diver may be attempting dives beyond his/her level of ability when the diver continues to fail multiple dives in an event. At this point the diving referee probably has developed a concern for the safety of the diver. Up until this year the referee could disqualify the diver under 9-8-3b when it became apparent that the dives listed on the scoresheet were too difficult for the diver. This was a judgment call by the diving referee and the referee was sometimes reluctant to make the call thinking that the diver should be given another chance. In the interest of safety the Rules Committee this year added language to Rule 9-8-3 (not 9-8-3c as shown in the front of the rule book) that makes disqualification mandatory after two failed dives. This change does not preclude the use of judgment by the diving referee in applying 9-8-3b even after one failed dive but does require the diver to demonstrate a minimum proficiency in the execution of his/her dives to continue.

Even though rule changes this year were few, many of the changes focused on minimizing risk to the athlete while continuing to provide for fair and equitable competition. As you apply the rules this year, both new and existing, the Rules Committee reminds you to keep in mind a few basic principles in officiating swimming

and diving. Be an observer not an inspector, call what you see not what you don't see and, finally, the benefit of the doubt always goes to the athlete. Have a great season.

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