



**September 24, 2025**

**SITUATION ONE:** At a conference championship meet where relay takeoff judging pads (RJPs) are being used, meet management has indicated that the RJP data will only be used to confirm or overturn human-judge-initiated/dual confirmed exchange violation calls; no violation will be initiated solely by use of the RJPs. **RULING:** Acceptable procedure. The procedures described in NFHS Rules Book, Appendix D, are not REQUIRED; state associations are free to use this technology in other ways.

**State Association:** In order to have statewide uniformity for all competitions, the association may wish to determine a protocol that will apply to all high school competition in the state. Associations may want to utilize the Appendix D protocol or some other method, such as that described in this rule interpretation.

**Officials:** Irrespective of the RJP technology, officials designated to observe relay exchanges and possible violations MUST maintain a written record of their observations. Dual human confirmation is always preferred (Rule 4-6-2). Meet officials will follow the protocol designated by the state association or meet management. The meet referee should establish an efficient procedure for utilizing the RJP data and for confirming or overturning early takeoffs.

**SITUATION TWO:** The relay declaration card for South Beach High School indicates the following swimmers will swim in Lane 3 of the 200 free relay: Smith, Robinson, Yang, Vasquez. No leadoff swimmer is indicated, although Smith is listed first. When the event is contested, the swimmers compete in the following order: Yang, Robinson, Vasquez, Smith. The referee DQs the South Beach High School relay for swimming out of order and for not indicating their leadoff swimmer properly. **RULING:** Incorrect. Under NFHS rules, no sanction is imposed for swimming in an order different than listed on the card nor for failing to list the leadoff swimmer. (3-2-5)

**State Association:** State associations may, at their discretion, impose additional administrative requirements for relay declarations that are not in conflict with NFHS rules and penalties. If such are created, the association must adequately notify officials of these additional requirements and how they are to be implemented.

**Coaches:** As a matter of habit, coaches should always indicate the leadoff swimmer on any relay declaration, even though there is no penalty for failing to do so.

**Officials:** There shall be no change in the leadoff swimmer after the long whistle (8-3-3): The first swimmer of a relay team, once called to the starting platform by the referee's long whistle, shall not

change the swimming order in the relay event with any teammate (1-4-3a). The only prohibited change is one involving the leadoff swimmer and one of the other relay team members, after the long whistle has sounded; changing the order amongst swimmers 2, 3 and 4 is permitted. Meet officials should have procedures in place appropriate to assure that proper declaration of the four swimmers participating in the event has been achieved.

**SITUATION THREE:** The Crown Point High School coach wants his athletes to swim the medley relay in the 400-yard freestyle relay event and asks the referee to permit his leadoff swimmer to utilize a backstroke start. The referee refuses. **RULING:** Correct procedure. Rule 8-2-4a stipulates that the forward start is to be utilized in all freestyle events. The leadoff swimmer is permitted to start in the water, but a backstroke start is not permitted. (Rule 8-1 NOTE)

**Coaches:** While coaches may utilize freestyle events to observe performance of other strokes, they may not use times achieved in a freestyle event for any purpose other than a freestyle time.

**Officials:** Thorough familiarity with all the details of the starting rules is essential – see Rule 8-1 and accompanying Situations and Rulings. In a freestyle event, any stroke or combination of strokes/styles may be used and no disqualification for body position or arm/leg movement should be imposed.

**SITUATION FOUR** [New Rule 8-3-4a]: In a relay event using starts from the deck, the following three situations are observed:

1. The third swimmer in Lane 2 stands two feet back from pool edge. As the second swimmer finishes, the third swimmer steps forward, left leg first and then right, and executes a two-footed takeoff. **RULING:** Violation. At least one foot must be stationary at the edge of the deck when the preceding swimmer finishes.
2. The second swimmer in Lane 6 is standing with her left foot stationary at the edge of the deck. As the first swimmer touches the end wall, she moves her right leg forward and executes a two-footed takeoff. **RULING:** Legal.
3. The fourth swimmer in Lane 5 is standing with her left foot at the edge of the deck and her right leg extended behind her. As the incoming swimmer approaches, she moves her right leg several times to achieve a comfortable position and finally takes off from her left foot only as the third swimmer finishes. **RULING:** Legal. **COMMENT:** The new rule requires only one foot be in a stationary position at the edge of the deck while the incoming swimmer is approaching her/his finish. Movement of the other leg is permissible prior to and after the finish of the incoming swimmer.

**Coaches:** Coaches must remind their swimmers that the relay takeoff rule is different for a deck start. Movement that is permitted when using starting platforms is NOT permitted for a deck start.

**Officials:** Officials must be carefully attentive to what subsequent swimmers are doing as they prepare for each exchange. The new rule greatly simplifies this process in that now the only requirement is to

have one foot stationary at the edge of the deck when the preceding swimmer finishes. Other body movements are now irrelevant.

**NFHS Swimming and Diving Resource of the Week:**

**Teaching Starts Using the Backstroke Ledge -** <https://nfhs.org/sports/swimming-diving/resources>

**Guidelines for Officiating Swimmers With Disabilities -** <https://nfhs.org/sports/swimming-diving/resources>