



January 14, 2026

NFHS Swimming and Diving Weekly Rule Interpretations

SITUATION 1: Due to recent rains the water level in the outdoor pool is 2 inches above the gutter. The pool is otherwise functioning properly. The host team has backstroke ledges. The official does not allow either team to utilize the ledges because the ledges would be outside of the usable range. **RULING:** Correct procedure. The top of the ledge may be adjustable to 1.57 inches (4 cm) above or below the water level and shall not be used outside of this range.

State Association: Well in advance of the 2025-26 swim season, the state association should communicate to all its constituents the current status of the state's action regarding Rule 2-7-3: immediate adoption of the rule for this season along with the content of state policy with respect to use of the backstroke ledges. Each State Association must first adopt the use of the ledges via an appropriate policy. Without that adoption, ledges shall not be used in that state.

Officials: The new rule imposes no new duties on meet officials, though State Associations may wish to utilize officials in a variety of ways that facilitate implementation of the state's policy. State Associations must clearly communicate expectations of officials in their role regarding backstroke ledges. Each State Association must first adopt the use of the ledges via an appropriate policy. Without that adoption, ledges shall not be used in that state. The rule spells out the dimensions for the starting ledges which are to be identical for all lanes.

Coaches: When scheduling meets and preparing for competition, coaches should exercise due diligence in providing the opportunity for athletes to utilize backstroke ledges during warm-up.

SITUATION 2: In a dual meet, after the conclusion of the 200-yard freestyle relay the official moves to lane 3 and notifies the last swimmer of an early take off by the 3rd swimmer. The 3rd swimmer approaches the official lets the official know that this was the wrong call and comments on the official's ability to officiate. **RULING:** The relay is disqualified, and the swimmer is removed from the remainder of the meet.

State Association: The state associations must proactively promote sportsmanship. It is recommended that associations promote sportsmanship by instituting a sportsmanship program throughout the state.

Coaches: Competition is often attended by enhanced intensity that can easily become excessive. Coaches should be especially attentive to athletes who may be prone to exuberance and carefully remind all athletes that proper conduct must be observed throughout ALL aspects of the competition.

Officials: Officials should address proper sportsmanship with the athlete and coaches at the Pre-meet conference. Officials should identify and penalize clear violations of proper sportsmanship remembering that each instance should be addressed as a learning opportunity.

SITUATION 3: 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:

Swimming and Diving Rules Best Practices: <https://nfhs.org/sports/swimming-diving/resources>

One Meter Diving Table with Video Clips: <https://nfhs.org/sports/swimming-diving/resources>

Officials Documents and Forms: <https://nfhs.org/sports/swimming-diving/resources>