November 18th, 2026

NFHS Swimming and Diving Weekly Rule Interpretations

Backstroke Ledges, Diving, Accommodations

Rules References: 2-7-3, 3-2-1, 3-3 NOTE, 3-5, 3-6-2a, 8-2-1c

SITUATION 1: The South Central conference has divers participating from all six member schools. Rather than conducting the diving event as part of the weekly dual meet swimming competition, the League conducts a weekly diving "invitational" at a predetermined site. All divers participate and their six-dive performances are judged by a panel of 7 judges (one per school plus the diving referee). The divers' scores from the schools competing against one another that week are then compiled, places established, and event results are included as part of the team scores. **RULING:** This would be a permissible configuration, pending approval by the State Association. **COMMENT:** Having representation from each school on the judging panel is a laudable means of providing neutrality in the actual judging of the competition. Agreement of all participating schools would be an important element in setting up this or a similar system. Entries by each school should be equal to that of the corresponding swimming events in the dual meet, and participation in the diving event should be counted in the individual event total for the conference meet. **COMMENT:** There is no rules requirement that all events in a dual meet competition be held at the same facility, provided other rules requirements (qualified officials, proper water depth, etc.) are met.

SITUATION 2: A visually impaired swimmer is using an assistant at each end of her lane who taps her just prior to each turn. **RULING:** Pending approval/authorization by the State Association, this is an acceptable practice. **COMMENTS:** Prior consultation with the state office is critical to ensure their approval of this accommodation, before it is adopted. Electronic devices that transmit information to the swimmer during the event would not be permissible under Rule 3-5.

Notes: Before backstroke starting ledges may be used in any high school competition, the relevant state association MUST adopt the use of this device. It is recommended that coaches and athletes receive training in how to use the device appropriately.

SITUATION 3: Swimmers are observed doing the following: (a) placing the backstroke starting ledge upside down so that the thicker edge is on top, (b) placing the device with the edge against the wall so that the vertical surface is now horizontal, providing an 8-cm surface for the feet. **RULING:** Improper. If noticed prior to the start of the race, the starter/referee shall instruct the swimmer to install the device as intended. If not detected until after the race has started, no penalty shall be imposed. **COMMENTS:**

State association policy should stipulate that the backstroke starting ledge be used per manufacturer's specifications and installed as intended (not upside-down for example). Swimmers should be trained in the appropriate installation of the backstroke starting ledge. Officials should observe the device being installed and correct any inappropriate installations prior to the long whistle. If an athlete refuses to follow the official's instruction, that athlete may be sanctioned under Rule 3-6-2a and disqualified from the event. If the backstroke starting ledge is improperly installed and a violation is not detected prior to the start of the race, there is no current rule basis for penalizing the swimmer.

SITUATION 4: The following is observed: (a) The backstroke starting ledge is installed so that the top edge is 4 cm above the surface of the water; or (b) the top edge of the device is placed 12 inches below the water surface. **RULING:** For (a), the device is legal; for (b) the device is incorrectly installed, and the swimmer should be instructed to correct the violation prior to the start of the race. **COMMENTS:** State association policy MUST follow the parameters of Rule 2-7-3. There is no rule basis for penalizing a swimmer for having the device installed improperly; the ONLY way an athlete can be penalized in this context is if the official provides specific instruction to the athlete and the athlete refuses/fails to follow those instructions. Otherwise, there is no sanction for improper installation and then utilizing the device. In instances where the device is above the surface of the water, officials must be aware of the position of the swimmers' toes. If the toes are curled over the gutter, that must be corrected prior to the starting signal; if it occurs after the signal, the swimmer must be disqualified. (8-2-1c)