AQUATICS

The Official Special Olympics Summer Sports Rules shall govern all Special Olympics aquatics competitions. As an international sports program, Special Olympics has created these rules based upon Federation International de Natacion Amateur (FINA) and national governing body (NGB) rules for aquatics. FINA or NGB rules shall be employed except when they are in conflict with the Special Olympics Sports Rules. In such cases, the Special Olympics Sports Rules shall apply.

An athlete with Down syndrome who has been diagnosed with Atlanto-axial instability may not participate in the butterfly stroke and diving starts.

SECTION A — OFFICIAL EVENTS

Swimming Events

The official distances for all Special Olympics events will be conducted in a meters pool. Local competitions may be conducted over any distance, but official times from meters pools will be seeded in first priority for international competition over any other distance.

1. 50 Meter Freestyle
2. 100 Meter Freestyle
3. 200 Meter Freestyle
4. 400 Meter Freestyle
5. 800 Meter Freestyle
6. 1500 Meter Freestyle
7. 50 Meter Backstroke
8. 100 Meter Backstroke
9. 200 Meter Backstroke
10. 25 Meter Breaststroke
11. 50 Meter Breaststroke
12. 100 Meter Breaststroke
13. 200 Meter Breaststroke
14. 25 Meter Butterfly
15. 50 Meter Butterfly
16. 100 Meter Butterfly
17. 200 Meter Butterfly
18. 100 Meter Individual Medley
19. 200 Meter Individual Medley
20. 400 Meter Individual Medley
21. 4 x 25 Meter Freestyle Relay
22. 4 x 50 Meter Freestyle Relay
23. 4 x 100 Meter Freestyle Relay
24. 4 x 200 Meter Freestyle Relay

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25. 4 x 25 Meter Medley Relay
26. 4 x 50 Meter Medley Relay
27. 4 x 100 Meter Medley Relay
28. 4 x 25 Meter Freestyle Unified Sports® Relay
29. 4 x 50 Meter Freestyle Unified Sports Relay
30. 4 x100 Meter Freestyle Unified Sports Relay
31. 4 x 200 Meter Freestyle Unified Sports Relay
32. 4 x 25 Meter Medley Unified Sports Relay
33. 4 x 50 Meter Medley Unified Sports Relay
34. 4 x 100 Meter Medley Unified Sports Relay

The following events provide meaningful competition for athletes with lower ability levels:

35. 25 Meter Freestyle
36. 25 Meter Backstroke
37. 15 Meter Walk
38. 15 Meter Flotation Race
39. 25 Meter Flotation Race
40. 10 Meter Assisted Swim
41. 15 Meter Unassisted Swim

SECTION B — PERSONNEL

1. Lifeguard Qualifications

a. Current lifeguard certificate

b. Current CPR certificate

c. Current standard first aid certificate (or equivalent)

The aforementioned qualifications are issued by the National Red Cross or equivalent national certification from country of origin. A lifeguard may not be engaged in any other activity while performing his/her duty as a lifeguard. If a coach is also a trained lifeguard, he/she may not coach and guard at the same time. They must do one job or the other.

2. Head Coach Qualifications

a. It is recommended that the Head Coach be certified by Special Olympics.

b. The Head Coach should possess a current certification in CPR and standard first aid (or equivalent).

c. It is recommended that the Head Coach have some level of basic life saving certification.

d. If the Head Coach, or any coach, shall serve as a lifeguard, they must meet the qualifications as specified above.

3. Responsibilities of Head Coach or Event Director

The Head Coach or Event Director shall have the overall responsibility for the Special Olympics aquatics practice sessions or events.

a. Providing an orientation to all aquatics personnel before the Special Olympics session or event.

b. Coordinating the facility with host agency prior to arrival.

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c. Ensuring that necessary supervisory personnel are available.

d. Preparing or assuring that an emergency action plan is in place as described in section C, Safety Considerations, which follows.

e. Examining the facility to ensure that the minimum quality standards are present in the following areas for each aquatic session or event:

1) Safety equipment

2) Traffic patterns

3) Sanitary water conditions

4) Safe environmental factors

5) When a beach or lake is used for a Special Olympics aquatics session or event, the Director of Aquatics shall take extra precautions to ensure that safe aquatics practices are followed.

Note: All participants, including athletes, coaches and volunteers who participate in any boating activity, whether in a pool or on open water, are required to wear a certified life preserver at all times when inside the boat.

f. Ensuring that lifeguards are aware of Special Olympics athletes who may have a history of seizures.

g. Medical restrictions exist for some athletes (for example, Down syndrome athletes diagnosed with Atlanto-axial instability competing in butterfly, individual medley events and dive starts). Prior to allowing athletes to compete in these events, the Event Director should review the General Rules section on eligibility.

4. Race officials (including the referee, timers and judges) must be certified by the respective governing body, including officials of events for athletes of lower ability.

SECTION C — SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

All Special Olympics aquatics training, recreational sessions and competition events shall be conducted in accordance with the following practices, rules and procedures in order to ensure the safety and well-being of all Special Olympics athletes, coaches and volunteers:

1. Basic Rules

a. There shall be at least one certified lifeguard on duty for every 25 swimmers in the water.

b. The sole function of the lifeguard shall be to guard. If no relief lifeguard is available, the pool must be emptied, even for a short duration, when a lifeguard must leave the pool side.

c. The Head Coach or Event Director will review the Emergency Action Plan prior to each occasion. There shall be enough coaches in accordance with FINA or program NGB guidelines.

d. Athlete medical history forms shall be on site and relevant information shall be discussed with the lifeguard or medical personnel on duty in advance of the aquatic activity.

e. Pool depth must be marked and easily visible.

f. The minimum depth of the pool shall be 1.52 meters (5 feet) for racing starts from a starting block. A swimmer may dive from the side of the pool without starting block if the depth is at least 1.22 meters (4 feet). No springform diving is allowed unless there is a minimum of 2.74 meters (9 feet) of water depth.

g. Safety lines must be in place to divide shallow and deep water areas during recreational aquatic activities.

h. A pool facility shall not be used unless a satisfactory inspection rating is received prior to any Special Olympics participant entering the water.

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i. An athlete with Down syndrome who has been diagnosed with Atlanto-axial instability may not participate in the butterfly stroke, diving starts and diving. For additional information and the procedure for waiver of this restriction, please refer to Article I, Section L, 7, f.

2. Emergency Action Plan

An Emergency Action Plan shall be in place prior to any Special Olympics participant entering the water for any reason, be it training, competition or recreation. The original plan should be written and reviewed by the staff on hand. The plan shall include the following:

a. The procedure for obtaining emergency medical support if a medical doctor, para-professional or medical support is not present.

b. The posts and areas of responsibilities for each lifeguard.

c. The procedure for obtaining weather information or weather watch information, particularly if the event is outside.

d. The procedure for reporting accidents.

e. The chain of command in case of a serious accident, including who is assigned to talk to the press.

f. Other items as may be required by local jurisdictions.

3. Supervisory Personnel Requirements

An adequate number of supervisory personnel shall be present at all aquatics sessions, events or recreational activities. The type of personnel will vary in accordance with the following requirements:

a. Recreational Programs:

1) Enough certified lifeguards to provide a ratio of guards to swimmers of 1 per 25.

b. Training Programs:

1) Enough certified lifeguards to provide a ratio of guards to swimmers of 1 per 25.

2) Enough coaches (preferably Special Olympics certified) to provide for adequate supervision and training of each athlete.

c. Competitions:

1) Enough certified lifeguards to provide a ratio of guards to swimmers of 1 per 25.

2) Enough supervision to provide for a ratio of observer to swimmers of 1 per 2 for those swimmers who are prone to seizures.

3) Enough supervision to provide for a ratio of observer to divers of 1 per 10.

SECTION D — GENERAL RULES

The technical rules of competition are noted in the FINA Rule book. National/U.S. Special Olympics Programs may substitute their local NGB rules. The FINA rule book will be used for all multi-Program events. Exceptions to these rules are listed below.

1. All Events

a. The Meet Referee, in cooperation with the Games Director, shall have the authority to adjust these rules on a case-by-case basis for the safety and well-being of an athlete. The Meet Referee may intervene in the competition at any stage to ensure that the appropriate regulations are observed, and shall adjudicate all protests related to the competition in progress.

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b. The Meet Referee shall have the discretion to allow for certain modifications/interpretations of the current technical rules based upon a physical disability characteristic. Such interpretation shall be requested and ruled on prior to the athlete's participation in a final and shall not give advantage over another swimmer. Stroke interpretations will be concerned with the action a limb(s) is performing. The Stroke Judge shall be concerned with what action the arm or leg action constitutes.

c. The Meet Referee shall have full control and authority over all officials, approve their assignments and instruct them regarding all Special Olympics features or regulations related to the competitions. He/she shall enforce all rules and decisions of the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules and FINA rules and shall decide all questions relating to the actual conduct of the meet, the final settlement of which is not otherwise covered by these rules.

d. Standing on the bottom during freestyle events or during the freestyle portion of the medley events shall not disqualify a competitor, but he/she shall not walk.

e. Standing upon the bottom in the racing course is allowed only for the purpose of resting. Walking on or jumping from the bottom must disqualify the offender.

f. Assistant starters may be used to assist athletes in maintaining their positions at the starting line.

g. No competitor shall be permitted to use or wear any device that may aid his/her speed, buoyancy or endurance during a competition (except flotation races) such as webbed gloves, flippers, fins, etc.). Goggles may be worn.

h. Swimmers may be assisted from the water upon request.

2. Equipment

a. Starting devices may include the following: whistle, horn, gun. Athletes with hearing impairments may receive hand signal starts from the starter or a designated official. A strobe light in accordance with FINA rules is recommended.

b. Lane lines

c. Watches (timing system); at least one watch per lane is required.

d. Flags should be located 5 meters from each end of the pool to indicate distance to the finish, especially in respect to backstroke events.

e. For flotation races, each athlete is responsible for his/her own flotation device. The device must be of the body wrap-around type such that if the athlete were to not be able to hold onto the device, the device would still support the athlete with his/her face out of the water. (Flotation devices such as kickboards, inner tubes or floats that wrap around the arms are not acceptable for use at any time).

3. Relay Events

a. There shall be four swimmers on each relay team.

b. Each swimmer shall swim one-fourth the distance of the total relay. No swimmer shall swim more than one leg of any one relay.

c. Relay team members must come from within the same delegation.

d. A relay team which combines genders to include both male and female athletes shall compete as a male relay.

e. Relay swimmers should exit the pool as soon as possible following the completion of their relay leg.

4. Walking & Flotation Events — These events provide meaningful competition for athletes with lower ability levels. No flotation device is allowed for any race other than the specified flotation races and assisted swims.

a. Set-up

1) There should be at least one observer for every two swimmers during competition.

2) The starting line should be marked the appropriate distance from the finish.

3) The depth of the pool should be no more than 1 meter (3.5 feet) deep for walking events.

4) It is preferable that certified swimming officials (including the referee, timers and judges) be used in all events.

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b. Rules

1) For walking events, the athlete must have at least one foot touching the bottom of the pool at all times.

2) No flotation device is allowed for any race other than the specified flotation races.

5. **Unassisted Swims** — These events provide meaningful competition for athletes with lower ability levels.

a. Athletes must swim the full distance with no assistance. (Coaches, lifeguards, officials and spectators are allowed to offer encouragement and direction to the swimmer, but only from outside the swimmer's lane).

6. **Assisted Swims** — These events provide meaningful competition for athletes with lower ability levels.

a. Each athlete is responsible for having his/her own coach/assistant. The assistant may touch, guide or direct the athlete, but may not support or assist with the athlete's forward movement. The swimmer is allowed to use a flotation device (see specifications listed in section D, 2 Equipment). The assistant may be in the pool or on the deck.

7. **Unified Sports Events**

a. Relays

1) Each Unified Sports relay team shall consist of two athletes and two partners.

2) Swimmers on a Unified Sports relay team may be assigned to swim in any order.

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