

“ONE START RULE” TO BE USED THIS SEASON

This coming May swimmers, coaches, and officials will be adjusting to a significant change in the starting procedure for each race. After much discussion with coaches and officials for the past two seasons, the BCSSA Board of Directors has approved a number of changes related to the start. The most significant of these is the elimination of having a second start when a false start is detected in the first start of a race.

This is a “major change” for those who have only been exposed to the starting procedure that provides a second chance. The rationale for making the change is the observation made by many experienced coaches and officials that the rule is not equitable because only one swimmer benefits from the opportunity of a second start. The swimmer that “false-starts” removes the opportunity for any other swimmer to be given a second chance. Furthermore, that swimmer may deliberately false-start to gain a psychological advantage over the other swimmers in the race.

In practical terms, every start will now proceed in nearly the same manner as a second start was conducted before. Swimmers who start before the signal is given will be disqualified before the race is started. Swimmers who start early when the signal is given will be disqualified following the race. Both of these occurrences follow our previous practice with the second start in past seasons.

Removing the second start opportunity is not the only change that has been made to starting procedures. In order to simplify what officials will need to observe, a forward motion prior to the signal will be the primary reason for disqualification. Leg twitches, raised heels, and the like will not normally be cause for disqualification. However, the starter will continue to seek motionless competitors before signaling the start. Failure to adopt a motionless stance may be viewed as unnecessarily delaying the start and this is still grounds for disqualification.

Swimmers will now be allowed to touch or hold the blocks or the edge of the pool with their hands prior to the starter advising the swimmer to “take your marks”. Previously, swimmers could not make such contact prior to the command. This will permit swimmers to assume a more stable position if they wish and so avoid losing their balance if that is a concern. It will also save the need for the restart that often occurred when swimmers unintentionally entered the water as the starter tried to tell swimmers to move their hands away from the blocks.

This season will be one of adjustment as everyone adapts to the new rules. One of the concerns will be the consequences for the inexperienced and youngest swimmers who may lose their balance or fall in just before the start. Applying the “one start rule” to only the older swimmers was considered. However, such a rule would simply defer learning to execute a “proper” start. SNC introduced the “one start rule” a few years ago with the same concerns and found that the youngest swimmers adapted quickly and were not adversely affected by the change. Just as young swimmers cope satisfactorily with disqualifications while learning to perform other swimming techniques such as butterfly and

backstroke correctly, it is felt they will take this in stride as well. We parents may find adjusting stressful, but our children will no doubt teach us to cope too.

Officials will need to familiarize themselves with the changes and their consequences. Remember, clinics are not just for the training of new officials. This year a review will be especially important so that everyone understands and is able to conduct starts under the new rules and is aware of a few other changes that have also been approved. So, coaches and officials, be sure to obtain your copy of 2005 Edition of the Rulebook to be sure you have the official wording of the rules that reflect these changes, and plan to attend a clinic in your Region.

Tony Dixon, Provincial Director of Officials.