

**NFHS Weekly Swimming Rule Interpretations**  
**December 17, 2025**

**SITUATION 1:** Just prior to the 500-yard freestyle, a competitor cannot be located and fails to report for the event as was listed on the entry card. The race commences; the swimmer suddenly appears, dives into the assigned lane, and starts competing. At the completion of the race, the referee disqualifies the swimmer as well as all of his teammates who were competing in this race. The swimmer is also disqualified from the remainder of the meet. (See 3-6-4-PEN 1)

**RULING:** Correct procedure.

**COMMENT:** Although the swimmer was listed as a participant in that event, the swimmer failed to report for the start of the race and therefore is a non-participant at the time of entering the water, and the swimmer is disqualified from further competition. (3-2-2, 3-2-2 PENALTIES, 3-6-4 PENALTIES)

**Coaches:** Coaches must provide instruction to their athletes on the necessity of reporting for the event at the designated time and place, as well as the importance of their taking personal responsibility for being where they should be. Coaches should also be aware of all situations where an entered swimmer is not present for the start of a race and immediately communicate with meet officials to avoid unnecessary delays or confusion. In such a situation, it may be possible/appropriate to utilize a declared false start. (Rule 3-2-3, 2nd paragraph)

**Officials:** In ALL meets, officials should have a pre-determined protocol in place, in collaboration with the meet announcer, for dealing with swimmers who are not at the starting area when a race is imminent. It is certainly appropriate to call for a missing swimmer, either by name or by lane assignment. Officials should also be attentive to surroundings to prevent inappropriate entry into the pool during a race.

**SITUATION 2:** The swimmer in lane 4 loses to lane 5 in a closely contested race. He gets out of the pool after the loss throws his cap and goggles and then turns over a chair exclaims a profanity.

**RULING:** The official disqualifies the swimmer from the event.

**State Association:** The state associations must proactively promote sportsmanship. The associations should promote sportsmanship by instituting a sportsmanship program throughout the state.

**Coaches:** Coaches should take the NFHS Learn.com sportsmanship course and promote the sportsmanship program from the state and local area.

**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:** A swimmer is participating in the preliminaries of a championship meet. The 200-yard medley relay on which the swimmer competed qualified third for the next day's finals. In addition, the competitor qualified fourth for the finals in the individual medley. As the prelim session continues, the competitor is observed taunting another competitor prior to the start of the backstroke event. The referee immediately removes the swimmer from the backstroke and declares the swimmer ineligible for participation in the 400-yard freestyle relay. In addition, the swimmer is prohibited from competing the next day in the 200-yard medley relay, and is also removed from the individual medley, with qualifiers reseeded accordingly.

**RULING:** Correct procedure.

**COMMENT:** The penalty for unsporting conduct includes removal from competition for the remainder of the meet. Preliminaries and finals are considered one meet. In this case, the swimmer is disqualified from all events in the subsequent session for which the swimmer had qualified previously. The 400-yard freestyle relay may compete in the prelims if an eligible alternate is available. Likewise, the 200-yard medley relay may still compete in the finals if an eligible alternate is available.

**Coaches:** End-of-season/culminating 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:** Likewise, officials must take a pro-active approach in meets where there is a strong likelihood of intense emotion and exuberance. Beginning with the coaches'/captains' pre-meet conference, officials should be aware of potential for improper conduct and take appropriate steps to warn athletes away from such behavior.

**SITUATION 4:** A championship meet is hosted by a facility with a 10-lane pool. Lanes 1 and 10 are open and will not be used for competition. Meet management has relay takeoff judges observing 4 lanes of competition, either Lanes 2 thru 5 or Lanes 6 thru 9.

**RULING:** Appropriate practice.

**COMMENT:** In championship meets, a relay takeoff judge shall be assigned to observe relay exchanges in no more than four lanes. In this situation, each relay takeoff judge is observing four lanes of competition. (Appendix D, #2, Page 108)

**Officials and Coaches:** Appendix D refers to suggested protocols for electronic relay judging equipment, and not a part of Rule 4-6. State association may determine officials' jurisdictions during state championship competition.