



Special Olympics Open Water Swimming

Rules

Version 1

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Background

Open Water Swimming is one of the fastest growing and most challenging sports on earth. Over 6,500 open water races take place each year worldwide in outdoor bodies of water such as oceans, lakes and rivers. Special Olympics supports athletes in their desire and determination to participate in this sport and keep pace with the rest of the world.

In 2011, Open Water Swimming made its debut at the Special Olympics World Games in Athens, Greece. Thirty-five athletes participated in the 1.5K open water swim demonstration. Special Olympics open water swimming has seen tremendous growth since the World Games with hundreds of athletes participating in open water races around the world. The 2015 World Games will be held in Los Angeles, California where Open Water Swimming will be an official sport for the first time.

Rules for open water swimming are significantly different than rules for pool swimming. The Special Olympics Open Water Swimming Rules are intended to provide the fairest open water competitions for athletes under the safest possible conditions for everyone involved. These Rules shall govern all Special Olympics Open Water Swimming events and are provided to educate swimmers, coaches, parents, officials, Race Directors and Technical Delegates.

1.0 Overall Safety

- 1.1 Open water swimming athletes, coaches, administrators, parents and officials must recognize that the open water environment involves variable conditions, is at times unpredictable and can become dangerous quickly. All competitors and participants should be prepared for adjustments made by the event organizers in order to protect the safety of all involved.
- 1.2 All participants, coaches and delegates must recognize the authority of the Race Director or Technical Delegate as having the final word on if and when a scheduled event takes place.
- 1.3 The Organizing Committee must declare in the meet information its policy for course changes (such as shortening or changing directions), postponement or abandonment of the competition due to dangerous weather or water conditions.

2.0 Distance and Venue

- 2.1 Open Water Swimming events can be of any distance in an open body of water.
- 2.2 The current standard distance for SO Open Water Swimming competitions is 1.5 kilometers.
- 2.3 Non-Standard distances such as 500 meters, 1 kilometer, or up to 5 kilometers may be considered by specific event organizers based on the ability of participants and the venue.

- 2.4 Open water swimming events can be conducted in any natural or man-made body of water that has been tested and approved for swimming by the local health or environmental protection agencies and deemed safe by the local or national open water lifeguard agency. These bodies of water may include oceans, bays, seas, lakes, rivers, dams, reservoirs, lidos, lagoons, lochs, ponds, creeks, estuaries, straits, channels, lidos, canals and rowing basins.

3.0 Equipment

- 3.1 Wetsuits and other technical swimsuits that may offer buoyancy or additional protection from the cold or elements may be used at the discretion of the event organizers and may only be allowed in a manner that maintains fairness in competition for all participants and shall take into consideration whether all participating athletes have the funding or access to resources for technical apparel.
- 3.2 If there shall be a separate classification for wetsuit swimmers, it shall be clearly stated in the event information and on the accompanying entry form and shall be discussed in all pre-event meetings with coaches, athletes and officials.
- 3.3 A participant may use a maximum of two swim caps.
- 3.4 A reasonable application of body grease, lanolin or petroleum jelly is allowed.
- 3.5 Nose clips, ear plugs and goggles are permitted.
- 3.6 Adaptive equipment for athletes with specific physical conditions must be approved by event organizers or games committee.
- 3.7 Except as previously provided in Sections 3.1-3.6, no swimmer shall be allowed to use or wear any device that may be an aid to his/her speed, buoyancy or endurance such as fins, hand paddles, pull buoys or floats of any kind.

4.0 Swimming Style

- 4.1 All open water competitions shall be freestyle events, but athletes may swim any stroke including backstroke, breaststroke or sidestroke.
- 4.2 During the race, athletes may stand, rest, tread water and touch piers, boats, paddleboards, kayaks, cables, ropes and safety personnel in the water if they are tired, nervous or in need of help or encouragement. Athletes are not allowed to make forward progress or improve their position in the competition while utilizing any of the above listed means to rest or recover.
- 4.3 Athletes may push off, walk, jog or run in the water at the start of the event where an on-shore start is used.
- 4.4 Athletes may push off, walk, jog or run in the water as they are preparing to exit where an on-shore finish is used.
- 4.5 Athletes are not allowed to make forward progress by pushing off, walking, jogging or running on the bottom once they have begun swimming and are more than 100 meters from the race start or finish line.
- 4.6 In individual open water swimming events, athletes may draft off one another at any distance behind other Special Olympics participants.



5.0 The Start

- 5.1 Events may be started either
 - 5.1.1 In-water where athletes stand or tread water in a depth sufficient for them to commence swimming on the start signal; or
 - 5.1.2 From the beach where athletes line up and run into the water from the shore on the Starter's signal; or
 - 5.1.3 From a fixed platform where athletes' positions on the platform are determined by random draw and they commence racing on the start signal.
- 5.2 The method for starting any event shall be determined by what is safest for all participants and in consideration of the unique conditions of a specific course or venue.
- 5.3 The start signal shall be both audible and visible.
- 5.4 When the start for Men's and Women's competitions is staggered, the Men's events shall always start before the Women's events.
- 5.5 If, in the opinion of the Head Referee, an unfair advantage has been gained by someone at the start, that swimmer may be disqualified.
- 5.6 Prior to the start all escort safety crafts shall be stationed so as to avoid interference with any competitor. If catching up to their swimmers from behind, the craft shall navigate in such a way as to avoid manoeuvring through the field of swimmers.
- 5.7 The start line shall be clearly defined by either overhead apparatus or by removable equipment (e.g., rope, banner, lane lines, buoys) at the water level.

6.0 The Finish

- 6.1 Events may be finished either
 - 6.1.1 On shore, which is always the preferred method; or
 - 6.1.2 At the water's edge; or
 - 6.1.3 In the water but only where an in-water finish system is available.
- 6.2 It is allowed, but not required, to have the finish filmed and recorded by video system with slow motion and recall facilities including timing equipment.
- 6.3 The finish line shall be clearly defined and marked and, where possible, should be stationary and securely fastened in place so as to not be moved by wind, tide, or force of the swimmer striking or running over it.
- 6.4 The final approach to the finish shall be clearly defined with markers or lane lines or rope of a distinctive color. The area leading to the finish apparatus should be clearly marked by rows of buoys which narrow as they get closer to the finish line.
- 6.5 Safety craft should be stationed at the approach to and entrance of the finish lane to ensure that only swimmers enter or cross this entrance. Escort craft shall not be permitted in the finish chute.
- 6.6 Within 100 meters of the finish line, rescue and safety obligations shall fall to shore and shallow water based safety personnel.



- 6.7 For an on shore finish, the finish line shall be the minimum distance from the water's edge necessary to provide a safe finish area for the swimmers and event participants.
- 6.8 Automatic timing devices, such as timing chips, may be used for timing of the race. Actual finish placement shall be determined by manual finish judging and/or video replay of the finish.

7.0 Event Safety Requirements

The event safety requirements begin long before the athletes arrive at the event, and in order to insure the safety of all participants the Safety Officer and safety plan should be appointed and developed in conjunction with all event planning.

7.1 Venue Selection

Each venue will require specific equipment and personnel to insure participant safety. The Safety Officer, event organizers, and coaches must evaluate the following in selecting a venue for competition and training:

- 7.1.1 The water quality must be deemed safe for recreational activities by the local environmental or health department.
- 7.1.2 All participants, spectators, coaches, race organizers and emergency personnel must be able to safely access and depart the area with all required equipment.
- 7.1.3 The water conditions, including seasonal or ongoing tides, waves and currents must not negatively impact participants or safety personnel so that the conditions become unsafe.
- 7.1.4 The water temperatures must fall into the designated safe levels.
- 7.1.5 If dangerous weather conditions develop, all personnel must be able to be rapidly and safely evacuated to safety.
- 7.1.6 Submerged jetties, pilings, trees, fence lines, pipes and other obstructions must be identified and avoided.
- 7.1.7 The entire course must be either visible from one location or there shall be additional safety personnel stationed along the course with the ability to maintain communication with the Safety Officer.
- 7.1.8 Recreational users either in the water or on watercraft should be relocated during the actual event so as not to interfere with the event.

7.2 Emergency Action Plan

The Safety Officer and Race Director shall meet with local public safety officers and agencies to develop a pre-event and emergency action plan for worst-case scenarios. The plan should include but not be limited to:

- 7.2.1 Conditions that dictate delays or event cancelation
- 7.2.2 Dangerous weather or water conditions
- 7.2.3 Wildlife issues such as jellyfish or dangerous marine life
- 7.2.4 Public, participant and event staff communication procedures
- 7.2.5 Watercraft acquisition and deployment
- 7.2.6 Organizational chart and contact information for all event and local personnel involved in the event
- 7.2.7 Known medical conditions of participants



7.3 Safety Briefings

- 7.3.1 Emergency Personnel – Safety Officer shall conduct a safety meeting with all rescue personnel at least 2 hours prior to event start and before deployment onto the course. Topics to be covered are communications, radio protocols and emergency action plans
- 7.3.2 Coaches & Race Director – Safety Officer shall conduct a safety meeting at least 1 hour prior to the event start with coaches and the Race Director to communicate final safety requirements and course conditions. Safety Officer shall have reviewed existing conditions on the course including updates on tides, currents and weather so that these can be conveyed to those attending.
- 7.3.3 Coaches and Participants – Approximately 15 minutes prior to the race start the Safety Officer shall provide a final safety briefing to all swimmers and Unified Partners as well as coaches and officials.
- 7.3.4 Translators should be available at all briefings

7.4 Safety Equipment

The following are critical safety items that should be available to on-water or on-shore lifeguards and safety personnel in addition to the medical resources from local Emergency Medical Services, Ambulances or Public Safety Officers

- 7.4.1 Self propelled rescue craft - Rescue paddleboards, kayaks or stand-up rescue paddleboards
- 7.4.2 Rescue cans or tubes
- 7.4.3 Rescue fins – For lifeguards without rescue craft who may be required to assist swimmers in distress
- 7.4.4 Whistles
- 7.4.5 Backboard & collar – For stabilization and transportation of possible spinal injuries
- 7.4.6 Radio units in sufficient quantity for land and water based safety personnel. {See section 7.6}

7.5 Motorized watercraft

- 7.5.1 Non-official craft should be kept out of the event area, and the Race Director or Safety Officer must communicate with local recreational watercraft users to alert them of the upcoming event.
- 7.5.2 Motorized propeller driven watercraft should be equipped with propeller guards
- 7.5.3 Motorized watercraft should maintain a distance of at least 30 yards outside of the projected swim area except in the event of an emergency.
- 7.5.4 Motorized watercraft should endeavour to operate in a manner that does not subject swimmers to the craft's exhaust which can cause breathing or medical distress in swimmers
- 7.5.6 In an emergency it is recommended that non-motorized craft or lifeguard swimmers make first contact to stabilize a potential**



victim and move them to a safe area for pick-up by a motorized watercraft.

7.6 Communication Protocols

7.6.1 Radios – For Safety Officer, 2-4 for On-water personnel, Start area, Finish area, Head referee, Emergency Medical Services

7.6.2 Whistles – With signalling protocols communicated to all safety personnel typically:

- 3-Shorts – Emergency
- 1-Long – Attention

7.6.3 Hand Signals – Protocols communicated to all safety personnel

- Clinched fist on head or both hands touching above head – OK, Under control
- Raised hand – Attention, Assistance needed
- Raised hand waving left to right – Emergency, Resuscitation needed
- Raised arms crossed above head – Emergency, Missing swimmer / submerged victim (Code X or Code Red)

7.7 Safety Personnel Deployment

7.7.1 Start – Issues at the start of the race may include: panic, cold water shock response, spinal injuries, trauma from contact with hazards or other swimmers. Emergency Medical Services should be on alert prior to the start in order to quickly stabilize, treat and remove possible victims. Lifeguards and safety personnel should be stationed at the water's edge and up to 100 meters out into the water, and all personnel should be equipped with whistles and rescue cans. Rescuers in deeper water should have rescue fins or be on a self-propelled rescue craft. Backboards and spinal stabilization equipment should be at the race start. **ALL RESCUE PERSONEL SHOULD BE TRAINED AND CERTIFIED IN RENDERING ASSISTANCE AND STABILIZING SUSPECTED SPINAL INJURIES.**

7.7.2 On-water – Certified lifeguards should be stationed on the course on self-propelled rescue craft or in the water with fins and rescue cans so that a rescuer can reach any swimmer on the course within 30 (thirty) seconds. Venue and water conditions will dictate the exact distance, and the following is a guide only for the distance that can be covered in the allotted response time:

- Rescue Paddleboard – 75 – 100 meters in 30 seconds
- Rescuer with fins and rescue can – 35 – 50 meters in 30 seconds
- Motorized (Non-propeller driven) rescue craft – 200 – 300 meters in 30 seconds

7.7.3 Finish – Issues at the finish will be similar to those encountered at the Start and in beach finishes with breaking waves extra attention should be given to athletes entering the area where waves are breaking in shallow water when they are at greater risk for spinal injuries. Emergency Medical Services should be on alert prior to

athletes arriving at the finish area in order to quickly stabilize, treat and remove possible victims. Lifeguards and safety personnel should be stationed at the water's edge and up to 100 meters out into the water, and all personnel should be equipped with whistles and rescue cans. Rescuers in deeper water should have rescue fins or be on a self-propelled rescue craft. Backboards and spinal stabilization equipment should be at the race finish. **ALL RESCUE PERSONEL SHOULD BE TRAINED AND CERTIFIED IN RENDERING ASSISTANCE AND STABILIZING SUSPECTED SPINAL INJURIES.**

7.7.4 Additional considerations

- Rescuers should be equipped with wetsuits, dry suits or clothing that will enable them to safely perform their duties in the water for up to 3 hours.
- Number and distribution of rescue personnel must be re-evaluated prior to the event start to insure safety standards can be maintained in the event of changing conditions or past experiences from similar events on the same course. Longer events in ocean or extreme conditions may require additional support as fatigue or exposure can hamper a rescuer's ability to maintain the required level of care and attention.

7.8 Escort Safety Craft

In race distances of 3,000 meters or more, each swimmer may have an individual escort safety craft accompanying them throughout the race.

- 7.8.1 Escort safety craft shall maintain a constant position to the side of their swimmer and shall manoeuvre so as to avoid obstructing, impeding, placing at risk or otherwise interfering with another swimmer.
- 7.8.2 Each escort safety craft shall contain a race official and the minimum crew required to operate the escort safety craft.
- 7.8.3 - Recreational or non-official watercraft shall not be permitted on the course during warm-up or during the race until the last swimmer has been removed from the course.
- 7.8.4 Coaching and the giving of instructions by a swimmer's coach or representative from an escort safety craft, feeding platforms, pier, dock, jetty or shoreline is permitted. No whistles or air horns may be used by coaches.
- 7.8.5 Prior to the event start all individual escort safety craft must be stationed so as to avoid interference with any competitor which should be roughly 200 meters from the race starting line.
- 7.8.6 When moving into position alongside their designated swimmer the individual escort craft shall manoeuvre outside the field of swimmers so as not to interfere with or injure competitors.
- 7.8.7 Individual Escort Safety Craft shall not be permitted within the finish chute.



8.0 Marking

- 8.1 Prior to the start, swimmers shall be marked with their race numbers on their swim caps, hands, upper arms and backs.
- 8.2 Numbering on competitors shall be done utilizing black, permanent ink markers or temporary tattoos so that the numbers are at least 2" in height and clearly legible.
- 8.3 Paddlers and escort boats for individual swimmers shall also be marked on both sides with the swimmer's race number so it is easily seen from either side.

9.0 Disqualifications

A swimmer shall be disqualified for:

- 9.1 Willfully or intentionally delaying or impeding the progress of another swimmer. Note: Incidental contact, especially at the start of the event and around the turn buoys, shall not be a basis for disqualification;
- 9.2 Failing to swim the prescribed course.
- 9.3 Failing to complete the prescribed course within the time limit. Competitors who do not finish the course within the time limit shall be removed from the water except that the Head Referee may allow a competitor outside the time limit to complete the course but not participate in any points or prizes awarded. The competitor shall still be eligible for a participation award;
- 9.3 Receiving propulsive aid, forward progress or improved position from anyone in boats or other escort craft of any kind or from pushing off, walking, jogging or running on the bottom, except as specifically permitted in Sections 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5;
- 9.4 Violating the equipment rules;
- 9.5 Actions of his/her escort safety craft or coach that interfere with another swimmer's progress or for failure of his/her craft or coach to heed the instruction of an assigned official;
- 9.6 Violating the "Honest Effort Rule" according to Article I of the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules where applied under Section 30.1.8 of these Rules; or
- 9.7 Violating the Rules governing Unified Open Water Swimming Teams as set forth under Sections 31.2, 31.3 and 31.4.

10.0 Disqualification Procedures

- 10.1 If, in the opinion of the Referees, any swimmer or escort safety craft commits any of the infractions on these Rules, the following procedure shall apply:
 - 10.1.1 First Infraction – A yellow flag and a card bearing the swimmer's number shall be raised by the Head Referee to indicate and to inform the swimmer that he is in violation of the Rules. Whistles may be used by the Referee to get the swimmer's attention.
 - 10.1.2 Second Infraction – A red flag and a card bearing the swimmer's number shall be raised by the Referee to indicate and to inform the swimmer that he is, for the second time, in violation of the Rules.



The swimmer shall be disqualified. However, the swimmer shall be allowed to continue swimming on the course and complete the race.

Whistles may be used by the Referee to get the swimmer's attention.

10.1.3 The Head Referee shall record the swimmer's number and violation at the time of the infraction and shall communicate the information to onshore race officials.

10.1.4 Notification of the infraction shall be made to the swimmer's coach as soon as reasonably possible.

10.2 The Referee may disqualify a swimmer without prior warning if in his opinion the action of the swimmer or escort craft is deemed to be unsportsmanlike.

Examples of unsportsmanlike conduct include intentionally striking another swimmer and refusal to re-round a turn mark after being advised the mark was missed.

11.0 Officials

11.1 There should be no fewer than the following officiating positions filled.

Race Director (may also be known as Competition Manager)

Head Referee

Assistant Referee

Safety Officer

Medical Officer

Course Officer

Clerk of Course

Starter

Race Judge (one per competitor in escorted races)

Turn Judge (one at each change in the direction of the course)

Chief Timer and 3 timers

Chief Finish Judge and 2 finish judges

Recorder

Communications Officer – Bilingual and/or have an assigned translator

Announcer

11.2 A Technical Delegate and other officials may be added for larger events.

11.3 The positions of Referee, Safety Officer, Finish Judge, Communications Officer and Timer shall not be combined with the duties of any other official.

12.0 The Race Director (may also be known as Competition Manager)

The Race Director shall

12.1 Have the overall responsibility for the Special Olympics open water swimming practice sessions and events;

12.2 Determine the course of an open water swimming event in consultation with local open water lifeguard agencies and marine rescue departments;

12.3 Examine the facility and course to ensure that maximum quality standards are present, including but not limited to sanitary water conditions, safe environmental conditions, safety and rescue equipment and safe aquatic practices;



- 12.4 Coordinate the facility with host agencies prior to arrival;
- 12.5 Ensure all necessary officials and supervisory personnel are available;
- 12.6 Provide an orientation to all open water personnel before the session or event; and
- 12.7 Prepare or ensure an Emergency Action Plan is in place.

13.0 The Head Referee

13.1 The Head Referee shall

- 13.1.1 Enforce all rules and decisions of the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules, FINA and Special Olympics Open Water Swimming Rules;
- 13.1.2 In cooperation with the Race Director and Technical Delegate, have the authority to adjust these rules on a case-by-case basis for the safety and well being of all individuals involved;
- 13.1.3 Have the authority to intervene in the competition at any stage to ensure that the appropriate rules and regulations are observed;
- 13.1.4 Have the discretion to allow for certain modifications and interpretations of the rules;
- 13.1.5 Adjudicate all protests related to the competition;
- 13.1.6 Have full control and authority over all officials, approve their assignments and instruct them regarding all rules and Special Olympics features and regulations related to the competition.
- 13.1.7 Ensure that all participants, coaches, and event support personnel are briefed about the course, safety procedures and any site-specific rules applying to the event;
- 13.1.8 Have the authority to stop the race or to change the distance and/or race course due to safety concerns or unforeseen circumstances;
- 13.1.9 Have the authority to use any video or electronic or mechanical judging devices in judging the finish order or in making other rulings; and
- 13.1.10 Signal by a raised flag and a series of short blasts on a whistle that the start is imminent and when satisfied that the swimmers are ready, indicate by pointing the flag at the Starter that the competition may commence.

13.2 The Head Referee, in cooperation with the Race Director and Technical Delegate, may

- 13.2.1 Elect to start the race in waves whereby each wave (heat) is separated at the start from the previous wave by a set time interval. Swimmers' times shall be adjusted by the starting time interval and their order of finish shall be determined on the basis of the adjusted time; and
- 13.2.2 Segregate competitors into the men's and women's or other classifications (e.g., by age group), either by the position at the starting line or by separate time of start.



14.0 The Assistant Referee

The Assistant Referee shall perform all duties assigned by the Head Referee.

15.0 The Safety Officer

The Safety Officer shall

- 15.1 Be responsible to the Race Organizers for all aspects of safety related to the conduct of the competition
- 15.2 Create an Emergency Action Plan for each open water event;
- 15.3 Ensure that each escort craft meets accepted international safety standards for protecting swimmers in an open water environment and in conditions present in the chosen venue
- 15.4 Ensure that the entire course and especially the start and finish areas are safe and free of all obstructions
- 15.5 Ensure that a sufficient number of appropriate motorized and non-motorized rescue craft are available during the competition to provide safety backup for the escort boats
- 15.6 Ensure that there are a sufficient number of certified lifeguards on duty on land and in water
- 15.7 When applicable, provide race officials and coaches tide and/or current charts indicating the time of tide changes on the course and showing the relationship between tides or current and swimmers' progress along the course
- 15.8 Advise the Head Referee if conditions are unsuitable for staging the competition and/or make recommendations for the modification of the course or the manner in which the competition is conducted
- 15.9 Be a certified water rescue professional or a member of the local marine rescue or lifeguard agency with supervisory experience or management level experience overseeing aquatic safety services involving trained lifeguards in conditions similar to those found in the chosen venue
- 15.10 Be solely committed to the safety of all participants, officials, rescue personnel, escorts, coaches and spectators
- 15.11 Be the point of contact between local rescue and emergency personnel and race organizers before, during and after the event
- 15.12 Take part in all pre-race meetings with coaches and athletes
- 15.13 In accordance with Section 28 set for the below, take water temperature readings prior to the start of the event and continue to monitor water temperatures throughout the event as required under that section
- 15.14 Ensure that course is adequately marked prior to race start
- 15.15 Ensure that all lifeguards and safety personnel are in place prior to the race start
- 15.16 Ensure lifeguards and safety personnel are aware of athletes who have a history of seizures or any other relevant medical conditions
- 15.17 Maintain constant contact with safety personnel until the last participant has exited the water
- 15.18 Provide an after event Action report detailing the safety protocols followed and any issues that affected the event. The report shall be used to continually enhance the safety of future events



16.0 The Medical Officer

The Medical Officer shall

- 16.1 Be responsible to the Head Referee for all medical aspects related to the competition and competitors;
- 16.2 Inform the local medical facilities of the nature of the competition and ensure that all casualties can be evacuated to them at the earliest opportunity;
- 16.3 Be the on-site custodian of athlete medical history forms;
- 16.4 Advise Safety Officer, lifeguards and safety personnel of athletes who have a history of seizures and any other relevant medical conditions; and
- 16.5 Advise the Head Referee if conditions are unsuitable for staging the competition and/or make recommendations for the modification of the course or the manner in which the competition is conducted.

17.0 The Course Officer

The Course Officer shall

- 17.1 Be responsible for the accuracy of the survey establishing the distance of the course;
- 17.2 Prior to the commencement of competition, shall inspect with the Head Referee and Safety Officer the course to ensure that all points are correctly marked and all equipment has been correctly installed and is in working order;
- 17.3 Ensure that Turn Judges are in position prior to the start of the competition and report this to the Assistant Referee; and
- 17.4 Serve as pilot in the lead boat when one is used.

18.0 The Clerk of Course

The Clerk of Course shall

- 18.1 Assemble and instruct the competitors prior to the competition and ensure proper reception for the competitors at the finish;
- 18.2 Ensure that each competitor is correctly marked with his/her race number and that all swimmers have trimmed fingernails and are not wearing any jewelry including watches;
- 18.3 Be certain all swimmers are present, in the assembly area, at the required time prior to the start;
- 18.4 Keep competitors and officials informed of the time remaining before the start at suitable intervals and at one minute intervals for the last five minutes; and
- 18.5 Ensure all swimmers are accounted for at the conclusion of the competition.

19.0 The Starter

The Starter shall

- 19.1 Assume a position clearly visible to all competitors;
- 19.2 On a signal from the Head Referee, raise a distinctive flag to a vertical position holding the arm straight; and
- 19.3 Use an audible and visible start signal.



20.0 The Race Judge

In races where an Escort Safety Craft is used pursuant to Rule 7.8, the Race Judge accompanying the swimmer shall

- 20.1 Be positioned in the escort boat so as to be able to observe his or her appointed swimmer at all times to ensure compliance with the rules of competition and that any violations are recorded and reported to the Head Referee;
- 20.2 Have the authority to order a swimmer from the water upon expiration of the time limit or when so ordered by the Head Referee;
- 20.3 Ensure that the assigned swimmer does not take unfair advantage or commit unsportsmanlike impediment of another swimmer and, if the situation requires, instruct the swimmer to maintain clearance from any other swimmer; and
- 20.4 Immediately inform the Head Referee if the assigned swimmer withdraws from the event and shall record the completed distance and the time of the withdrawal.

21.0 The Turn Judge

The Turn Judge shall

- 21.1 Be positioned so as to ensure that all swimmers comply with the turn and other change-of-course procedures; and
- 21.2 Record any violation of the turn procedures and indicate to the Referee any infraction at the time it is observed.

22.0 The Chief Timer

The Chief Timer shall

- 22.1 Assign at least three Timers to their positions for the start and finish;
- 22.2 Brief the Timers on their duties and the details of their assignment;
- 22.3 Ensure that a time check is made to allow all persons to synchronize their watches with the official race clock, if applicable, at least 15 minutes before start time; and
- 22.4 May arrange for the use of automatic or semi-automatic timing devices in addition to watches.

23.0 The Chief Finish Judge

The Chief Finish Judge shall

- 23.1 Assign each Finish Judge to a position;
- 23.2 Brief Finish Judges on their duties and the details of their assignment; and
- 23.3 After the race, shall collect the signed results sheets from each Finish Judge and determine the order of finish and deliver the results to the Referee or his or her designee.

24.0 The Finish Judges

The Finish judges shall

- 24.1 Be positioned in line with and where he/she can have a clear view of the finish;
and
- 24.2 Record the finish place of each swimmer.

25.0 The Recorder

The Recorder shall record withdrawals from the competition, enter results on official forms, and maintain the record for team awards as appropriate.

26.0 The Venue

- 26.1 The course shall be measured as accurately as possible with the available navigational or survey equipment, but Global Positioning System (GPS) tools are recommended.
- 26.2 The course shall be in any body of open water that has been deemed safe for swimmers by the local health or environmental protection agency and subject to only minor currents or tide and may be salt or fresh water.
- 26.3 With the exception of beach starts and beach finishes, the minimum depth of water at any point on the course is recommended to be one meter.

27.0 Time Limits

- 27.1 Time Limits and/or Over the Time Limits may be used at the discretion of the Competition Management.
- 27.2 If Time Limits and/or Over the Time Limits are used in an event they shall be published in the event information and may be adjusted in the discretion of the Head Referee based upon venue and conditions, including but not limited to tides, currents, water and air temperatures.
- 27.3 Recommended Time Limits
 - 27.3.1 For an 800 Meter event, the recommended time limit is 30:00; and
 - 27.3.2 For a 1,500 Meter event, the recommended time limit is 1:00.
- 27.4 Recommended Over the Time Limits
 - 27.4.1 For an 800 Meter event, the recommended over the time limit is 30:00. That is, all athletes still on the race course 30 minutes after the first swimmer has finished may be removed from the swim course at the discretion of the Head Referee; and
 - 27.4.2 For a 1,500 Meter event, the recommended over the time limit is 45 minutes. That is, all athletes still on the race course 45 minutes after the first swimmer has finished may be removed from the swim course at the discretion of the Head Referee.

28.0 Water Temperatures

- 28.1 Minimum
 - 28.1.1 The minimum water temperature for conducting an open water swimming event shall be 16°C (60.8°F).
 - 28.1.2 Races shall not take place if the combined air temperature and water temperature when added together are 33°C (91.4°F) or lower.

28.2 Maximum

- 28.2.1 The maximum water temperature for conducting an open water swimming event shall be 31°C (87.8°F).
- 28.2.2 Races over 800 meters in distance shall not take place if the combined air temperature and water temperature when added together are 63°C (145.4 °F) or higher.

28.3 Water temperature readings shall be:

- 28.3.1 Measured 1 hour before the start of the race at a point in the middle of the course at a depth of 40 centimeters; and
- 28.3.2 Monitored at 1 hour intervals from the same place and depth as the pre-event readings.

28.4 Wetsuits shall:

- 28.4.1 be allowed in water below 29°C (84.2°F)
- 28.4.2 be mandatory in water at or below 17°C (62.6°F)
- 28.4.3 NOT be allowed in water at or above 28°C (82.4°F)

29.0 Turns and Changes in Direction on the Course

- 29.1 All turns and other changes in direction on the course shall be clearly indicated by markers that are colored so as to be distinguishable from the native surroundings and of sufficient size so that they are visible from a distance of at least 500 meters. Turn markers should also be positioned so that subsequent changes in direction can be seen from previous turn.
- 29.2 A clearly marked craft or platform for a turn judge shall be positioned at all locations where alterations in direction on the course occur whenever competitors are present. The craft or platform shall be positioned in such a manner as not to obstruct the swimmers' view or negotiation of the turn, while providing a clear view of the swimmers' turns for the officials.

30.0 Divisioning

30.1 General:

- 30.1.1 Athletes shall be divisioned by gender, age and ability.
- 30.1.2 Each division shall consist of 3-8 athletes.
- 30.1.3 Unified Open Water Swimming shall be designated as a separate division and divisioning rules shall apply separately to that category.
- 30.1.4 Where races are started as a mass start or in a staggered or wave start, divisions can be combined and may include swimmers from more than one division. The divisions may be swum together but shall be awarded separately.
- 30.1.5 To ensure correct divisioning, coaches shall enter the current personal best time for each swimmer.
- 30.1.6 Personal best times can be determined in meters or yards. To ensure accurate divisioning, the Race Director shall direct that all personal best times be converted to meters by a generally accepted conversion table.
- 30.1.7 If a time trial or preliminary race is conducted prior to the event finals, athletes shall be divisioned based upon those times.



30.1.8 Enforcement of the “Maximum Effort Rule” may be applied according to Article I of the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules.

30.2 Wetsuits

30.2.1 In events where divisioning is determined by a qualifying pool swim, a separate “wetsuit division” shall be designated and divisioning rules shall be applied separately to that category.

30.2.2 In events where athletes are divisioned together in an open water qualifying swim, a separate “wetsuit division” shall not be designed. Athletes who wear a wetsuit during the qualifying swim must wear a wetsuit during the finals. Athletes who do not wear a wetsuit during the qualifying swim may not wear a wetsuit during the finals.

30.2.3 If a race is to be conducted in weather conditions that allow or require wetsuit use, this information shall be provided in writing to all coaches and competitors in advance of arrival for the competition to provide reasonable opportunity for all athletes and coaches to obtain and train with appropriate equipment.

30.3 For events of 800 meters or greater, divisioning shall be determined by:

30.3.1 A preliminary qualifying time from a pool swim with a distance of at least half the open water race distance. To ensure accurate divisioning, the Race Director shall direct that all personal best times be converted to meters by a generally accepted conversion table.

30.3.2 Where possible, time trials or preliminary swims of at least half the open water race distance at the competition venue no later than 3 days prior to the actual event. These can be conducted in a pool or an open water venue which is the same for all competing athletes.

30.3.3 It is recommended that divisioning for a 1,500 meter open water race be established using qualifying times from an 800 meter swim or greater, up to the race distance.

30.3.4 It is recommended that divisioning for an 800 meter open water race be established using qualifying times from a 400 meter swim or greater, up to the race distance.

31.0 Unified Open Water Swimming

Unified Sports is conducted in accordance with three different models: recreation, player development, and competitive. The rules outlined in this Section apply to all these models but for 31.8, which applies only to World Games.

31.1 Unified Open Water Swimming Teams shall consist of one Athlete and one Unified Partner. A Unified Coach may not participate as a Unified Partner.

31.2 The Unified Partner will be expected to have completed basic preparedness training, provided by the coach, in order to react appropriately to an unexpected and/or emergency situation in the water.

31.3 The Athlete and Unified Partner must swim within 10 meters of each other at all times during the race.

31.4 For 1,500 meter open water races, there shall be a clearly designated checkpoint one-half way through the racecourse. Each Unified Team must swim by this checkpoint together and the Unified Partner shall call out the Unified Team number to checkpoint race officials.

- 31.5 The Athlete and Unified Partner shall cross the finish line no more than 10 seconds apart from each other.
- 31.6 Awards shall be determined based upon the finish time of the last Unified Team member to cross or touch the finish line.
- 31.7 Unified Teams shall be subject to the Disqualification Procedures under Section 10.0 for violations of Rules 31.3, 31.4 and 31.5.
- 31.8 At World Games, the Unified Partner and Athlete shall be of equal open water swimming ability. At all other open water swimming practices and events, the Unified Partner shall be of equal or greater swimming ability.

32.0 Records

Because of differences in course, currents and other physical factors, records for open water events are not maintained.

33.0 Abandonment

- 33.1 Where emergency conditions require a race to be halted before it is completed, the race should be re-started at the earliest possible time and the full distance completed.
- 33.2 Situations not covered above shall be determined by the Head Referee.

34.0 Protests

- 34.1 Coaches may protest results up to 30 minutes after the conclusion of the race. All results become official once the protest period has elapsed and the Head Referee has made a final ruling on all protests.

35.0 Eligibility and Minimum Age Requirements

- 35.1 The minimum age requirement for open water swimming events shall be 14 years of age.
- 35.2 Eligibility in the form of qualifying times, experience and/or other qualifying criteria may be established, if necessary, by the host Organizing Committee.