
2025
U.S. MASTERS SWIMMING
CODE OF REGULATIONS
AND
RULES OF COMPETITION

U.S. Masters Swimming was founded in 1970 and remains dedicated to the premise that the lives of participants will be enhanced through swimming. This book establishes certain rules and regulations for the conduct of the organization, the participants, and the competitors. The most up-to-date version of this rule book is available online at: www.usms.org/rules.

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This is an official publication of United States Masters Swimming Inc., the national governing body for Masters Swimming in the United States. Additional copies of this book may be purchased at a cost of \$12 per copy for shipping and handling from the USMS National Office at the above address.

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On the Cover: Swimmers and coach pose around a whiteboard on the deck in Irvine, California. Photo by Mike Lewis/@MIKE2SWIM.

Rule Book Dedication

Do a Google search for “Nadine Day” and “Hurricane Nadine,” “Masters Superwoman,” and the “Flyin’ Hawaiian” all appear. All three are apt titles for Nadine (although to be fair, that hurricane was not named for her).

She began swimming in her native Hawaii as an 8-year-old and quickly became proficient in both pool and open water competition. She competed in the 1988 Olympic trials, and was the overall top female finisher at the Waikiki Roughwater Swim four years running. As a U.S. Masters Swimming member she has logged 700 individual and 66 relay Top 10 swims and been named an All-American 19 times as an individual pool swimmer, seven times as a relay swimmer, and seven times as a Long Distance All-American.



Nadine Day

Since her first USMS annual meeting she has been a fixture. She has served on too many committees to count, but most notably Governance, Marketing, Safety Education, and Sports Medicine and Science (where she was a natural, thanks to her career as a physical therapist). She has served on the Board of Directors and as vice president of community services and in 2012 became the youngest president of USMS ever, and served in that position for four years.

As a Level 3 USMS certified coach and an Adult Learn-to-Swim instructor, Nadine has helped many a nonswimmer overcome their fear of water and many competitive swimmers to be the best they can be.

She is the recipient of a plethora of awards for her unstinting service to aquatics. She has been presented a USMS Dorothy Donnelly Service Award, Ted Haartz Staff Appreciation Award, and Capt. Ransom J. Arthur M.D. Award. *Swimming World* magazine named her as one of the Ten Most Impactful People in Swimming in 2018, and U.S. Aquatic Sports bestowed the Women in Swimming Award on her in 2020. She was also the chair of the U.S. Aquatic Sports annual meeting for several years. She received the ultimate award in 2023 when she was inducted into the International Masters Swimming Hall of Fame as an honor contributor. And Nadine is currently the chair of the Masters Technical Committee for World Aquatics.

But the most coveted title she owns is that she is *everybody's* friend. Once she's met you, you're her friend for life. And she *always* has a smile on her face.

Previous Rule Book Dedications

1989	June Krauser		Championships
1992	Mary Lee Watson		Organizing Committee
1993	Kathrine Casey and Gail Dummer	2008	Steve Schofield
1994	All USMS volunteers	2009	Meg Smath
1995	E. Kevin Kelly	2010	Bill Volckening
1996	Dorothy Donnelly	2011	Tracy Grilli
1997	Jack Geoghegan	2012	Esther Lyman
1998	USMS All-Americans	2013	Rob Copeland
1999	F.H. "Ted" Haartz	2015	June Krauser
2000	Jim Matysek	2016	Rob Butcher
2001	Gene Donner and the staff of Gateway Printing	2017	Tom Taylor
2002	Nancy Ridout	2018	Anna Lea Matysek
2003	Tom Boak	2019	Jeffrey Roddin
2004	Joanne Tingley	2020	Ralph Davis
2005	Walt Reid	2021	Ray Novitske
2006	Pieter Cath	2022	Ted Haartz
2007	Pacific Masters XI FINA World Masters	2023	Teri White
		2024	Patty Miller

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part 1: Swimming Rules

ARTICLE 101: Starts, Strokes, and Relays.....	1
101.1 Starts.....	1
101.2 Breaststroke.....	2
101.3 Butterfly.....	3
101.4 Backstroke.....	3
101.5 Freestyle.....	4
101.6 Individual Medley.....	4
101.7 Relays.....	5
ARTICLE 102: Swimming Competition.....	6
102.1 Eligibility.....	6
102.2 Age Determining Date.....	6
102.3 Age Groups.....	6
102.4 Warm-up/Warm-down.....	6
102.5 Events.....	7
102.6 Event Limit.....	8
102.7 Entries.....	9
102.8 Scratch Procedures.....	9
102.9 Relays.....	9
102.10 Lane Assignments—Seeding—Counters.....	10
102.11 Change of Program and Postponement.....	13
102.12 Swimwear for Pool Competition.....	14
102.13 Disqualifications.....	15
102.14 Protests.....	17
102.15 Tobacco Products.....	17
102.16 Use of Cameras, Video Equipment, and Drones.....	17
ARTICLE 103: Meet Procedures.....	18
103.1 Meet Director.....	18
103.2 Required Personnel.....	18
103.3 Qualification of Officials.....	18
103.4 Reporting of Officials and Meet Personnel.....	19
103.5 Meet Committee.....	19
103.6 Referee.....	19
103.7 Administrative Official.....	20
103.8 Starter.....	20
103.9 Recall Rope Operator.....	22
103.10 Judges.....	22
103.11 Timers.....	23
103.12 Clerk of Course.....	25
103.13 Marshals.....	25
103.14 Announcer.....	25
103.15 Recorder of Records.....	25
103.16 Press Steward.....	25
103.17 Timing Equipment.....	25
103.18 Official Time.....	28
103.19 Scoring.....	32
103.20 Awards.....	32
ARTICLE 104: National Championship Meets.....	32
104.1 Meet Categories and Dates.....	32
104.2 Meet Name.....	33
104.3 Awarding of National Championship Meets.....	33
104.4 USMS Assistance and Agreements.....	33
104.5 Conduct of National Championship Meets.....	33

ARTICLE 105: Records, Top 10 Times, and All-American Recognition.	40
105.1 Requirements for Records, Top 10 Times, and All-American.	40
105.2 Top 10 Times	42
105.3 USMS Records	43
105.4 All-American and All-Star	44
105.5 World Records	45
ARTICLE 106: Facilities Standards.	45
106.1 Definitions	45
106.2 Racing Course Dimensions	45
106.3 Racing Course Walls	46
106.4 Pool and Bulkhead Markings	46
106.5 Overflow Recirculation System	47
106.6 Water Temperature	47
106.7 Ladders	47
106.8 Other Deck Equipment	47
106.9 Lighting	47
106.10 No Smoking Signs	47
106.11 Starting Platforms	47
106.12 Backstroke Ledge	48
106.13 Floating Lane Dividers and Markings	48
106.14 Backstroke Flags and Lines	49
106.15 Loudspeaker Starting System	49
106.16 Recall Device	49
106.17 Pace Clocks	49
106.18 Automatic Timing Equipment	49
106.19 Electrical Safety	50
ARTICLE 107: Guidelines for Officiating Swimmers With a Disability in USMS Meets.	51
107.1 General	51
107.2 Blind and Visually Impaired	52
107.3 Deaf and Hard of Hearing	52
107.4 Cognitively Disabled	52
107.5 Physical Disabilities	52
ARTICLE 108: Sanction and Recognition of Pool Events	54
108.1 Sanctions	54
108.2 Recognized Events	56

Part 2: Administrative Regulations

ARTICLE 201: Membership and Representation.	57
201.1 Membership of Individuals	57
201.2 Membership of Clubs	58
201.3 Representation/Club Affiliation	58
ARTICLE 202: Sanction/Recognition of Pool Events.	59
202.1 Sanctions	59
202.2 Recognized Events	61
202.3 Recognized Swims	62
202.4 Fitness Events	62
ARTICLE 203: Sanction of Open Water Events.	62
203.1 Sanctions	62
203.2 Swimmer Verification	62
203.3 Sanction Requirements	63
203.4 Withdrawal or Denial of Sanctions	64
ARTICLE 204: Liability Release.	65
204.1 Release	65

Part 3: Open Water and Long Distance Swimming Rules

ARTICLE 301: Administration.....	67
301.1 Organization.....	67
301.2 Guide to Operations.....	67
301.3 Membership, Representation, and Sanctions.....	67
301.4 Age Determining Date.....	67
ARTICLE 302: Open Water Events.....	67
302.1 Events.....	67
302.2 Open Water Courses.....	68
302.3 Straightaway Swim Courses.....	69
302.4 Cumulative Relays.....	69
302.5 Sequential Relays.....	70
ARTICLE 303: Conduct of Competitive Open Water Events.....	70
303.1 Safety.....	70
303.2 Scoring Divisions.....	70
303.3 Officials and Staff.....	71
303.4 Swimwear for Open Water Events.....	72
303.5 Seeding.....	74
303.6 Starts.....	74
303.7 Finishes.....	74
303.8 Disqualifications.....	75
303.9 Escorted Swims.....	75
303.10 Swimmers With Disabilities.....	76
303.11 Incomplete Swim.....	77
303.12 Protests.....	77
ARTICLE 304: Conduct of Noncompetitive Open Water Swims.....	78
304.1 Noncompetitive Swims.....	78
ARTICLE 305: Conduct of Long Distance Pool Events.....	78
305.1 Events.....	78
305.2 Definitions.....	78
305.3 Cumulative Relays.....	78
305.4 Sequential Relays.....	78
305.5 Age Groups.....	79
305.6 Awards.....	79
305.7 Protests.....	79
ARTICLE 306: Conduct of Virtual Events.....	79
306.1 Rules.....	79
306.2 Pool Size.....	79
306.3 Officials.....	79
306.4 Eligibility.....	79
306.5 Multiple Swimmers per Lane.....	79
306.6 Timing.....	80
306.7 Determining Distances in Time-Based Events.....	80
306.8 Determining Times in Short-Course Distance-Based Events.....	80
306.9 Split Times.....	80
306.10 Integrity of Results.....	80
306.11 Determination of Place.....	80
ARTICLE 307: Open Water and Long Distance National Championships.....	81
307.1 Rules.....	81
307.2 Open Water and Long Distance Championship Events.....	81
307.3 Site Selection.....	82
307.4 Contract.....	82
307.5 Financial.....	83
307.6 Entry Fee.....	83
307.7 Rules of Conduct.....	83

307.8	Results.....	85
307.9	Club Scoring.....	85
307.10	Awards.....	85
307.11	All-American.....	86
307.12	All-Star Team.....	86
ARTICLE 308: USMS Records.....		86
308.1	Records.....	86

Part 4: Participation, Conduct, Hearings, and Appeals

ARTICLE 401: Participation.....		89
401.1	Protection.....	89
401.2	Participation.....	89
ARTICLE 402: Conduct.....		89
402.1	Standards of Conduct.....	89
402.2	Compliance With Rules and Regulations.....	89
402.3	Enforcement.....	89
402.4	Unsporting Conduct.....	90
ARTICLE 403: Hearings and Appeals.....		90
403.1	National Board of Review.....	90
403.2	Grievances.....	91
403.3	Authority of the National Board of Review.....	92
403.4	Authority of an LMSC.....	92
403.5	Duties of the National Board of Review Chair.....	93
403.6	National Board of Review Procedure.....	93
403.7	Appeal of LMSC Decision to the National Board of Review.....	93
403.8	Hearing Panel Procedure.....	94
403.9	Appeal to the Board of Directors.....	94
403.10	Documentation.....	94
403.11	Filing Fee.....	94
403.12	Recognition and Enforcement.....	96

Part 5: United States Masters Swimming Inc.: Organization and Bylaws

ARTICLE 501: Membership.....		95
501.1	Membership Categories.....	95
501.2	Mandatory Memberships.....	95
501.3	Equal Opportunity.....	96
ARTICLE 502: Local Masters Swimming Committee (LMSC).....		96
502.1	LMSC Membership.....	96
502.2	Bylaws.....	96
502.3	Annual Meeting.....	96
502.4	Fiscal Year.....	96
502.5	Election of Officers.....	96
502.6	Filing of Bylaws.....	96
502.7	Official Names and Boundary Descriptions.....	96
502.8	Records and Record Keeping.....	99
502.9	Financial Controls.....	99
502.10	LMSC Championship Meets.....	99
502.11	LMSC Standards.....	99
ARTICLE 503: Zones.....		99
503.1	Zone Names and Boundaries.....	99
503.2	Zone Meetings.....	99
503.3	Zone Chairs.....	99
503.4	Zone Policies.....	100

503.5	Zone Championship Meets.....	100
503.6	Communications.....	100
ARTICLE 504: House of Delegates.....		100
504.1	Membership.....	100
504.2	Powers.....	101
504.3	Meetings of the House of Delegates.....	101
ARTICLE 505: Officers.....		101
505.1	Positions.....	101
505.2	Elections and Term of Office.....	101
505.3	Duties of Officers.....	102
ARTICLE 506: Board of Directors.....		103
506.1	Membership.....	103
506.2	Election and Term of Office of At-Large Directors.....	103
506.3	Powers.....	103
506.4	Meetings.....	104
506.5	Quorum.....	104
506.6	Voting Privileges.....	104
506.7	Permanent Committees of the Board.....	104
506.8	Executive Committee.....	105
506.9	Removal of Board Members.....	106
506.10	Vacancies.....	106
ARTICLE 507: Committees and Appointments.....		106
507.1	Standing Committees.....	106
507.2	Ad Hoc Committees.....	109
507.3	Appointments.....	109
ARTICLE 508: Financial Policy.....		109
508.1	Fiscal Year.....	109
508.2	Fees.....	109
ARTICLE 509: Parliamentary Authority.....		109
509.1	Parliamentary Authority.....	109
ARTICLE 510: Indemnification.....		110
510.1	Coverage.....	110
510.2	Insurance.....	110
ARTICLE 511: Dissolution.....		110
511.1	Dissolution.....	110

Part 6: Amendment Procedures

ARTICLE 601: Amendments.....		111
601.1	Scope of Amendments and Changes.....	111
601.2	Submission of Proposed Amendments.....	111
601.3	Modification of Proposed Amendments.....	112
601.4	Adoption of Proposed Amendments.....	112
601.5	Emergency Actions.....	113
601.6	Effective Date.....	114
APPENDIX A: Information for Meet Directors and Officials.....		115
APPENDIX B: Numeric Codes and Abbreviations and Bidding Areas for Long Distance National Championship Meets.....		137
APPENDIX C: USMS Directory.....		141
INDEX.....		143

Guiding Principles

Mission Statement

Empower adults to improve their lives through swimming.

Vision Statement

Foster a nationwide adult swimming community through lifelong fitness, competition, and education.

Values

Fitness
Camaraderie
Inclusion
Learning
Excellence
Competition
Fairness

Major Changes for 2025

Pool National Championship Event Limits: The Championship Committee may cap events 200 yards/meters and longer to help manage the length of days at national championship meets. (article 104.5.3C[2])

Pool Measurements: The requirements for which lanes to measure for bulkhead confirmations have been clarified to ensure that competition lanes are being measured rather than any unused lanes. (article 105.1.7C)

Record Application Documentation: The needed documentation for USMS and World Aquatics records has been updated to better align with current practices and requirements. (article 105.3.9A[2])

Club Transfers: The 60-day waiting period has been replaced by a limitation of three club transfers per year. This does not include any club changes during the time of annual renewal or any transfers to unattached status. (article 201.3.5)

Conduct: One-event registrants are now included in the code of conduct. (article 402)

Hearings and Appeals: Article 403 was significantly rewritten to clarify the jurisdiction of an LMSC and the National Board of Review, and National Board of Review and hearing panel procedures. (article 403)

Modification of Open Water Rules for Disabled Swimmers: The referee is responsible for modifying rules to accommodate disabled swimmers. (article 303.3.1C)

Suit Ties for Open Water Events: Suit ties at the waist are acceptable. (article 303.4.2B)

Waive Prohibition on Open Water Personal Buoys: The Long Distance Committee may waive the prohibition on personal buoys for swims in which individual escorts are required and drafting is not permitted.

Clarification of Jurisdiction for Open Water Virtual National Championships: The National Office has jurisdiction for open water virtual national championships. (article 305.2.4)

Determination of Fees for Open Water National Championships: The National Office determines the fees for virtual national championships. The meet host determines the fees for all other national championships. (article 307.6)

Glossary

Administrative Referee—an official certified as an administrative referee who supervises entries, seeding, determination of official times, results, and meet personnel assisting with these duties.

Aggregate Time—times achieved by four individuals in separate starts that are added together to arrive at a relay time for entry purposes.

Anchored (Starting Platform)—stable at all times without human aid.

Arm—that part of the body that extends from the shoulder to the wrist.

Bulkhead—moveable end wall of a course.

Cable Swim—a type of straightaway swim defined by a cable.

Club—an organization or group of permanent character that is a member of USMS, and that actively promotes and/or participates in Masters Swimming.

Code—the *USMS Code of Regulations and Rules of Competition*, including Parts 1–6 and the Organizing Principles.

College Club Swimming (CCS)—A swimming program administered by USMS. CCS is the organization that unifies college club swimming programs across the country. CCS provides the rules, calendar of events, results database, and communications for CCS registered individuals and clubs.

Corporation—United States Masters Swimming Inc. (USMS).

Course—designated distance over which the competition is conducted.

Long Course—50 meters.

Short Course—25 yards or 25 meters.

Deck-Entered—all entries are accepted on the first or later day of that meet and subsequently seeded into events.

Deck-Seeding—with or without check-in, events seeded at the time of the event using entries received prior to or at the meet.

Drafting—in open water and long distance events, an individual swimming behind or next to a single swimmer or support craft for the purpose of taking advantage of the reduced water resistance.

Dual Meet—competition between two clubs.

Dual-Sanctioned Meet—A USMS sanctioned meet held in conjunction with a USA Swimming sanctioned meet in which swimmers from both organizations are competing together in the same session(s).

Electronic Timing Chip—used to trigger the timing system and may not be used as an audible pacing device in swimming.

End of the Course—designated wall for racing turns or finishes.

Escort Craft—boats or paddle boards that accompany swimmers in an open water swim for safety and logistical support, including the person or people that staff them.

Event—any clinic, demonstration, series of races in a given stroke and distance, or meet: including pool, long distance, and open water.

Event Director—the person responsible for the administration and conduct of the event.

Ex Officio Member—a committee member, appointed by virtue of an office or position held, who has participatory rights of membership but no vote.

FINA—*see* World Aquatics

Finish—the instant that a swimmer touches the wall at the end of the prescribed distance.

Finish Point—the physical location where the race terminates.

Fitness Events—events designed to encourage and enhance fitness.

First Day of Meet—day on which first competitive swimming event is conducted.

Foreign Swimmer—athlete member of a World Aquatics Member Federation other than USMS.

Forward Start—an entry made while facing the course or a start made while in the water either facing the course or not facing the course.

Foul—an instance of obstruction, interference, collision, or equipment malfunction that prevents the successful completion of a race.

Gender—a competition category defined as male or female for the purpose of athlete swimming eligibility for official times, places, records, and other forms of recognition.

Gender Identity—an individual's concept of self, which may be male, female, a blend of both, or neither.

Grease—a substance used by swimmers to reduce friction or reduce the loss of body heat during a swim.

Heat—a division of an event in which there are too many swimmers to compete at one time.

Heat Sheet—a list of events with names of swimmers, heat assignments, lane assignments, ages, affiliations (e.g., club, workout group, and/or LMSC), and seed times.

Horizontal—parallel to the level surface of the water.

Housekeeping—changes to the *USMS Code of Regulations and Rules of Competition* to correct errors of deviation from adopted language, non-conformity with the *USMS Publications Style Guide*, consistency of wording among multiple articles, or accuracy of numerical article and page references.

IOPC—International Olympic and Paralympic Committee.

Initial Distance—that first portion of a race for which an official time may be recorded but which is not itself a completed event.

Lane—the specific area in which the swimmer is assigned to swim.

Lane Line—continuous floating markers attached to a line stretched from one end of the course to the other for the purpose of separating adjacent lanes.

Lane Markers—the guide lines on the bottom of the pool and in the center of the lanes running from one end of the course to the other.

Last Day of the Meet—day on which last competitive swimming event is conducted.

Leadoff—the first part of the relay event that is swum by a single team member.

Leg (Relay)—the part of the relay event that is swum by a single team member.

Length—the extent of the course from end to end.

LMSC—Local Masters Swimming Committee.

Manual Start—the start of any timing device by an individual in response to the same starting signal given to the swimmers.

Marks—(take your) starting positions.

Masters Swimming—a program including training, competition, and other activities affiliated with United States Masters Swimming through the participation of USMS members or through a USMS sanction.

May—permissive, not mandatory.

Medical Identification Item—an item worn by a swimmer that identifies medical conditions, emergency contacts, or other information necessary to protect the health of the swimmer. Medical identification items are not considered part of swimwear.

Meet—an event or series of events held under sanction or recognition and conducted within 10 consecutive days at the same venue or multiple venues for virtual meets. Postal meets may be conducted over periods longer than 10 days.

Meet Announcement—document that sets forth required information about the meet, including the starting times, order of events, entry procedures, and other meet procedures as required by the rules and regulations.

Meet Program—information provided to swimmers, coaches, and officials pertinent to the operation of a meet, which should include entry lists with names, ages, and affiliations (e.g., club, workout group, and/or LMSC), but may also include heat sheets and/or other information.

Member—an individual, club, or organization registered with USMS.

Member in Good Standing—any person or club who has fulfilled the requirements for membership and who has not voluntarily withdrawn nor been expelled or suspended.

Must—mandatory.

Official time—a time achieved in a USMS-sanctioned or -recognized competition in accordance with USMS rules.

On the Back—position of the body when the shoulders are past vertical towards the back.

On the Breast—position of the body when the shoulders are at or past the vertical towards the breast.

Paddler—a person on a paddle board or manually propelled craft who supports a swimmer or group of swimmers.

Pool—the physical facility in which the competition is conducted.

Preliminary Heats—competition in which a number of heats are swum to qualify the fastest swimmers for the finals.

Preseeding—events are seeded prior to the day of competition.

Propulsive—having the power to propel.

Recognized Events—the written acknowledgment by an LMSC for a designated competition conducted in conformance with relevant USMS rules, or a demonstration, clinic, or exhibition conducted by USMS member clubs, individual members, or organizations other than USMS in which both members and nonmembers may participate. Times or distances achieved by members at recognized competitions will be considered for recording purposes by USMS.

Register—enroll as a member of USMS.

Safety Plans—written plans for the procedures to be followed in the event of an emergency or need for medical intervention.

Sanction—the written authorization of an LMSC to permit members to participate in a specific competition, demonstration, clinic, exhibition, or Swim-A-Thon.

Scissors Kick—use of the top of the instep of one foot and the bottom of the other foot in the propulsive part of the kick.

Scratch—withdraw an entry from an event or fail to report to the assigned lane in the assigned heat.

Seeding—distributing swimmers among the required number of heats and/or lanes, based on submitted times.

Session—any portion of a pool meet distinctly separated from other portions of the meet by locale, time, day, or type of competition; i.e., first day and second day, morning and evening, etc., exclusive of a short break between events such as before the start of distance events or relays.

Shall—mandatory.

Should—recommended but not mandatory.

Soft Touch—a swimmer’s touch that does not register a time at the point of contact with the touchpad.

Split Time—time recorded from official start to completion of an initial distance within a longer event.

Still Water—water contained within four walls or landlocked, having no perceptible current or movement other than that caused by wind or by swimmers.

Straightaway Swim—any swim of any length where the course shall be a straight, measured distance in stationary open water and defined by a cable with floats or a continuous marking system visible to the swimmer.

Submitted Times—those filed with an entry as having been previously achieved or reasonably estimated; also known as seed times.

Time Trial—a timed heat conducted within a meet where the swimmer races against the clock to establish an official time.

Timed Finals—competition in which only heats are swum and final placings are determined by the times achieved in the heats.

Touch—contact with the end of the course.

Turn—a point on the course where the swimmers reverse or change direction of the swim.

USA-S—USA Swimming Inc.

USAS—United States Aquatic Sports Inc.

USMS—United States Masters Swimming Inc.

Valid Time—a time reported by a designated timing system without a confirmed malfunction and determined by the meet referee or designee to be accurate based on analysis of all reported times, observations by officials, and other relevant data.

Venue—geographical area and environs where a swim event is conducted.

Virtual Event—a swimming competition conducted in multiple pool locations with results compiled in a central location.

Wall—the vertical portion of the pool, the contiguous surface of the deck and overflow gutters, the front portion of the starting block or platform, or the touchpad at the end of the course.

Warning Signal—a bell, whistle, air horn, or other appropriate audible device.

Wave—the second or subsequent start used if the start area cannot accommodate all contestants at the same time.

Will—consent to do, an expectation.

Workout Group—a subordinate organization (subgroup) of a USMS-registered club.

World Aquatics—(Formerly known as FINA).

Zone—a geographic section of the country that includes all LMSCs within that section.