



March 17, 2009

To: USA Swimming Member Clubs
USA Swimming Member Coaches
LSC General Chairs
LSC Permanent Offices

From: Bruce W. Stratton, Chair, USA Swimming Rules & Regulations Committee

Subject: Amendment to Article 103.2.2 of USA Swimming Rules (Water Depth)

At its meeting held on January 24, 2009, the USA Swimming Board of Directors adopted an amendment to Article 103.2.2 of the USA Swimming Rules. The amendment was modified on March 16, 2009 to be effective on May 1, 2009. The amendment was adopted pursuant to the provisions of Article 504.8 which provides the Board of Directors, with the advice and consent of the Safety Education Committee, the Rules & Regulations Committee and legal counsel, the authority to amend our Rules if they determine it is necessary for safety considerations. The Safety Education Committee, the Rules & Regulations Committee and our legal counsel have all approved the amendment.

The amendment specifically defines the term "teaching racing starts" and provides that teaching racing starts can take place only under the direct supervision of a USA Swimming Member Coach. Article 103.2.2, with the amended provisions reads as follows:

103.2 WATER DEPTH

- .1 /NC/2 meters (6 feet 7 inches) deep throughout the course.
- .2 /M/**Teaching Racing Starts** – Minimum water depth for teaching racing starts in any setting from any height starting blocks or the deck shall be 6 feet (1.84 meters) measured for a distance of 3 feet 3 ½ inches (1.0 meter) to 16 feet 5 inches (5.0 meters) from the end wall. (effective February 15, 2007)

"Teaching racing starts" shall include:

- 1) **all racing start instruction until a swimmer has been certified by his or her USA Swimming member coach as proficient in performing a racing start, and**
- 2) **all instruction, subsequent to certification, which seeks to alter a swimmer's basic technique in performing a racing start.**

Teaching racing starts shall only take place under the direct supervision of a USA Swimming member coach.

The definition of teaching racing starts now includes a requirement that a USA Swimming Member Coach "certify" that a swimmer is proficient in performing racing starts. The certification process includes the completion of a Racing Start Certification Checklist which is included as an attachment to this notice.

Prior to the adoption of this amendment and the associated Racing Start Certification Checklist, USA Swimming worked with the American Red Cross to update and modify its Safety Training for Swim Coaches Manual. The updated materials emphasize the importance of appropriate safety measures in teaching racing starts, including the proper progression for novice swimmers.

Attached as additional information and explanation of this change are the following:

1. **Racing Start Certification Checklist.** This process will be required to be completed for every swimmer. Additional information and requirements are shown on the checklist form.
2. **USA Swimming Safety Notice to All Member Clubs and Coaches.** This provides additional background and the basis for adopting the amendment and the certification process.
3. **USA Swimming Safety Notice to Parents.** This provides basic information to parents and emphasizes their responsibility in making sure their swimmer does not attempt to perform a racing start in less than six feet of water if they have not been properly certified. A copy of this Notice should be given to the parents of every swimmer and should be displayed prominently and regularly on team bulletin boards, in newsletters and in any new members packets.
4. **Racing Start Certification Checklist Frequently Asked Questions.** This should answer most of the questions that may arise regarding the certification process and use of the new Checklist.

This amendment and the certification process is very important to the safety of our athletes and also provides additional protection for our coaches in the event of an injury to an athlete. If you have any additional questions or need additional guidance regarding this, please contact Pat Hogan (719-866-3524 phogan@usaswimming.org) or Sue Anderson (719-866-3586 sanderson@usaswimming.org) at USA Swimming Headquarters. You should also feel free to contact me.



Bruce W. Stratton
Chair, USA Swimming Rules & Regulations Committee



USA Swimming

Safety Notice to All Member Clubs and Coaches

In its experience, United States Sports Insurance Company (“USSIC”) has observed that the greatest risk of serious head injury in swimming occurs in connection with teaching racing starts. In response, USSIC engaged Indiana University to conduct a racing start study. Several important observations from that study are:

- A swimmer who is told to dive straight down with arms at the side may well have sufficient head velocity at a six-foot depth to cause serious injury.
- Racing starts from the side of the pool are typically no more shallow than racing starts off the starting blocks.
- Experienced swimmers can always control the depth of their racing starts (unless they are trying a new technique). Most, but not all inexperienced swimmers can control the depth of their racing starts.

USA Swimming has taken the following steps in response to these observations:

- The American Red Cross Safety Training for Swim Coaches Manual and training course have been modified to emphasize the importance of appropriate safety measures in teaching racing starts, including the use of a proper progression for novice swimmers and the elimination of any technique that involves diving with arms at the side, over sticks, or through hoops, unless that technique is performed in a diving well. The revised version of the [Safety Training for Swim Coaches Manual](#) is now available. It can be found at www.usaswimming.org. (See Chapter 2: Head-first Entries and Racing Start Safety.)
- Effective May 1, 2009, USA Swimming’s Board of Directors has modified the racing start rule, 103.2.2 (which already provides that racing starts should only be taught in at least six feet of water) to further clarify that racing starts should only be taught under the direct supervision of a USA Swimming member coach, and to expand the definition of teaching racing starts to make clear that no swimmer who has not been certified as proficient by his or her coach should be performing racing starts into less than six feet of water (revised Rule 103.2.2 is attached).
- The certification process is described on the Racing Start Certification Checklist which was also approved by the Board. That document requires that for swimmers age 10 years and under or swimmers with less than one year of experience, the coach must certify that the swimmer has been trained according to the progression set forth on the form. (That progression is based on the revised Safety Training Manual). For older or more experienced swimmers, the checklist requires the coach to certify appropriate skill level based on the coach’s observation. The required certification is based on the coach’s professional judgment and must be recorded in writing for each swimmer. The Racing Start Certification Checklist and a FAQ document regarding that checklist are attached.



Racing Start Certification Checklist

Check the appropriate box as each step is satisfactorily demonstrated. Steps 1 through 5 are described with accompanying photos in the American Red Cross Safety Training for Swim Coaches Manual. Access the manual on the coaches' tab at www.usaswimming.org. (See Chapter 2: Head-first Entries and Racing Start Safety.)

Step 1-5 must be observed by the undersigned coach for all swimmers with less than one year of competitive experience or who are 10 years of age or younger.

Progression: The swimmer satisfactorily demonstrated the ability to safely enter the water using:

- Step 1: The sitting position
- Step 2: The kneeling position
- Step 3: The compact position
- Step 4: The stride position
- Step 5: A shallow head-first entry

Step 6 must be completed by the coach for all swimmers, regardless of age or experience. Check either one of the boxes below depending on the age and experience of the swimmer:

- For swimmers age 10 years and under and/or swimmers with less than one year of experience: The swimmer has satisfactorily completed the racing start learning progression and demonstrated the ability to safely execute a shallow racing start from a starting block.

OR

- For swimmers age 11 years and older with more than one year experience: Based on prior competitive experience, the swimmer is capable of safely controlling the depth of his or her racing starts.

Based on personal observation, it is the professional judgment of the undersigned coach that the swimmer identified below is capable of performing a shallow racing start on demand and can safely perform a racing start in four feet of water.





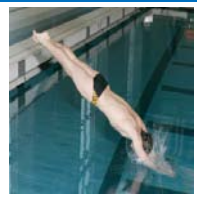
Name of the Swimmer Age

Name of the Coach (Please Print)

Club Name

Signature of the Coach Date

- Record keeping options:
 - An individual form signed by the coach for each USA Swimming member athlete
 - An attached roster signed by the coach documenting each USA Swimming member athlete (sample attached).
- This document must be maintained on file with the club listed above for three years.
- Prior to teaching racing starts check and understand the local and state laws regarding water depth.
- Keep up to date on all USA Swimming rules and information in teaching racing starts.

USA Swimming Racing Start Certification						Date Completed
	Step 1: Sitting Position	Step 2: Kneeling Position	Step 3: Compact Position	Step 4: Stride Position	Step 5: Shallow Dive	

<u>Swimmer's Name and Age</u>	<u>Sitting Position</u>	<u>Kneeling Position</u>	<u>Compact Position</u>	<u>Stride Position</u>	<u>Shallow Dive</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
6	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
7	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
8	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
9	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
10	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
11	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
12	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
13	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
14	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
15	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
16	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
17	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
18	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
19	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
20	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Coach's Name (Print): _____

Signature of Certifying Coach: _____ Date: _____

Note: This form must be attached to the signed Racing Start Certification Checklist (previous page).



Racing Start Certification Checklist

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why did the USA Swimming Board of Directors implement the Racing Start Certification Checklist?

Answer: The experience of the United States Sports Insurance Company (“USSIC”) and a recent racing start study commissioned by USSIC observe that teaching racing starts can potentially result in serious injury if not performed correctly. In response to these observations, the USA Swimming Board made changes to the existing six-foot depth rule for teaching racing starts. Those changes included making clear that the definition of teaching racing starts includes all racing start training until the swimmer’s coach certifies that the swimmer has the skill to perform a shallow racing start on demand into four feet of water. The Racing Start Certification Checklist establishes criteria for that certification.

2. What are the criteria for racing start certification?

Answer: In order for swimmers age 10 years and under and/or swimmers with less than one year of experience to be certified, the swimmer must have satisfactorily completed the racing start learning progression set forth in the [American Red Cross Safety Training for Swim Coaches Manual](#) also found on the Racing Start Certification Checklist. For swimmers age 11 and older with more than one year experience, certification is based on the coach’s observation that the swimmer is capable of safely controlling the depth of his or her racing starts. In all cases, the certification is based on the coach’s professional judgment—it is not and cannot be a guarantee.

3. What if a swimmer is certified at one club and then transfers to another?

Answer: The swimmer must be recertified at the new club.

4. Who is responsible for keeping copies of certification forms?

Answer: Each club is responsible for retaining, for three years, a certification form for each of its swimmers. There is no requirement that these forms be sent to an LSC or to officials responsible for any competition.

5. Does the certification process impose more liability on coaches?

Answer: No. A coach’s liability is already based on the coach’s exercise of good professional judgment in deciding whether a swimmer has the skills necessary to safely perform a racing start into less than six feet of water (including racing starts into the USA Swimming minimum starting depth of four feet). Certification simply documents that for each swimmer, such professional judgment was exercised. Similarly, coaches are also already responsible for following the progression set forth in the [American Red Cross Safety Training Manual](#) to teach racing starts to young or novice swimmers. Certification documents that the steps in the American Red Cross Safety Training Manual have been followed.

6. If a certified swimmer is injured while performing a racing start, will the coach be covered by USSIC insurance?

Answer: Yes, if the injury occurs in practice, at a sanctioned or approved competition, or at a closed competition. Competitions that are not an approved, sanctioned, or closed competition under the provisions of USA Swimming's Rules and Regulations have never been covered by USSIC. A coach who fails to follow the certification process will not be insured by USSIC in the event of injury.

7. Does the certification make a coach liable when a swimmer is injured performing a racing start at times other than under the coach's supervision?

Answer: No. To address the fact that swimmers may practice or compete outside the supervision of their coach, USA Swimming has prepared a Safety Notice to Parents, for posting at all member clubs. That Notice makes clear that it is the parents' responsibility to make sure that no child who has not been certified attempts to perform a racing start into less than six feet of water.

8. Are LSCs or meet officials responsible for checking that each swimmer participating in a competition has been safety certified?

Answer: No. It is the responsibility of the coach who is supervising his or her swimmers at a competition to use reasonable care to make sure that only swimmers who have been certified perform racing starts into less than six feet of water. It is the responsibility of the parents in circumstances where the coach is not supervising the swimmers.

9. Can swimmers who have not been certified still participate in swim meets?

Answer: Yes. However, they may not start from either a starting block or from the side of the pool and may start only from within the pool.

10. Where can I find information about teaching head first entry progressions and racing start safety?

Answer: The progressions are described with accompanying photos in the [American Red Cross Safety Training for Swim Coaches Manual](#). Access the Manual on the coach's tab at www.usaswimming.org. (See Chapter 2: Head-first Entries and Racing Start Safety.) The Red Cross Swimming and Diving Skills DVD includes a video of the progression.



USA Swimming Safety Notice to Parents

To avoid risk of serious injury, no swimmer who has not been properly trained should attempt to perform a racing start, from either a starting block or the side of the pool, into less than six feet of water.

USA Swimming has implemented a racing start certification program where a swimmer's coach documents his or her professional judgment that a swimmer has demonstrated sufficient skill to safely perform a racing start into four feet of water.

Although somewhat unusual, swimmers do not always participate in swimming competitions under the supervision of a certified coach. It is the parent's responsibility to make sure the swimmer does not attempt to perform a racing start in less than six feet of water if the swimmer has not been properly certified by the swimmer's coach to do so.