

Commonly Asked Rules/Officiating Questions and Answers for Divisional Relays

1. Towels on the Start

From the rulebook:

12.(3) The forward start (for Freestyle, Breaststroke, Butterfly, and Individual Medley) may be from the pool deck without the aid of devices which elevate any part of the swimmer's feet. A single flat towel may be used. Swimmers may start in the water, provided one hand touches the edge of the pool or gutter. NVSL Swim Rules

(4) The Backstroke start, in lieu of USA Swimming Rules, shall be as follows: (a) The swimmers shall line up in the water facing the starting end and may secure a handhold only below the knees of another person to prepare for the start. The heels of the persons providing such assistance shall not extend over the vertical plane of the end of the pool. Only one other person may assist the person whose legs are grasped by the backstroker. Assistance shall not be rendered by HEAD COACHES, Timers, or anyone officiating at the meet. (b) A towel may be draped over the pool edge to facilitate the swimmer's traction on the pool wall. Towels shall be removed from the pool edge before the swimmer returns to the starting end.

Per the Officials Co-Chairs - in the medley relay, the towel does NOT need to be removed after the backstroke leg since the breaststroker may use it for their start. If possible, a swimmer or timer should pull the towel back so it is not hanging over the pool edge. Failure to do so, however, is not a disqualification.

2. "Running starts"

In a relay, swimmers 2, 3 and 4 can operate in a space roughly the size of a starting block. The swimmer may take one or more steps as long as they accomplish it in an area the size of a starting block, and the final step brings one, or both, of their feet to the edge of the pool deck.

Also, note that the term running is a little bit of a misconception. The swimmer doesn't have to be running at all to get called for a running start. They just need to be starting further back than is generally accepted, which is about 30 inches.

Per Rule 12.c(1) (pg.76), the referee or an official whom they designate in advance may make the call.

The main goals are:

1. Make sure the starts are safe. The further back the swimmers get the more obstacles (to include things like timers, poles, canopies, debris on the pool deck, etc) they have to contend with.
2. Make sure the starts are fair for everyone. Just because a 15 - 18 boy is twice as tall as an 8 & Under girl, that doesn't mean the 15 - 18 boy deserves to start further back.
3. To provide an NVSL equivalent rule/restriction to what is used by USA Swimming. Similar to how we allow legs in NVSL for backstroke starts to provide an equivalent to the bar on the starting blocks the swimmers would use at a USA Swimming meet, we are allowing the swimmers to have some leeway on the starts for relays to account for the lack of starting blocks. But just like in USA Swimming, there are rules to make sure that these accommodations are not abused.

3. Tech suit questions:

12 and Under Tech Suit Guidance

Tech suits were banned by USA Swimming for 12 and Under swimmers on Sept 1, 2020, and adopted by NVSL for the 2021 season. The relevant USA Swimming rules can be found on page 85 of the 2026 NVSL Handbook. We've been operating under the new guidelines for a couple of summers, and retailers are good about identifying permissible suits for 12 and Under swimmers. Suits for 12 and Under swimmers feature sewn seams and woven fabric. They may not include a "Fina" logo and if they do, they should feature an additional green check mark indicating approval for 12 and Under use.

If a swimmer, coach, or team rep questions if a suit is permissible for a Relay Carnival or Divisional meet, the coach or team rep should speak with the meet referee with the swimmer (or bring their suit over) prior to the start of the meet to ensure the suit fits the rules for 12 and Under swimmers.

For purposes of applying the 12 and Under Tech Suit rules to NVSL swimmers, the determination of the age of the swimmer (i.e., whether they are 12 and under) is based on the birthday on June 1, the date which sets the age of the swimmer throughout the summer season. (See 2. b. on page 69 of NVSL handbook.)

4. Situational question

Situation: In an 8 & under relay, swimmer 2 is confused and dives in with starting beep at the same time as swimmer 1.

What should the RTOs, S&T and Referees do:

Answer from Officials Committee:

It is a DQ because a swimmer other than the one swimming that leg was in the water at the same time. S&T should raise their hand. This is one of the examples the Officials Committee uses with refs where, in the absence of an S&T raising a hand, the Ref should raise a hand. And, as always, if no one raises a hand, the team cannot be DQed after the event.

In addition, RTO judges should have noted an early takeoff on their RTO slips and the swimmer should have been disqualified for an early take off; so, the ref would have had a discussion with the RTOs to make sure they know how to properly do their job. When the ref does his/her Stroke Briefings, he/she should remind Stroke and Turn Judges that if they are on the turn end for relays to pay attention to the starts, and if the swimmer 2 looks like they might be getting ready to start at the start of the race, remind them to wait for the other swimmer to get to their wall, but never touch the swimmer. The ref also makes the same comment to the RTO judges on the turn end. The hope is that between the 6 officials the officials can prevent this situation from happening, but it does still happen. In those cases, swimmer 2 should be disqualified, even if they enter the water and then immediately get out.

5. *Bandages/first aid tape*

Team reps should notify the referee if they have any swimmers who plan to wear bandages, first aid tape or other medical tape to gain approval prior to competition. While USA Swimming recently removed the prohibition on elastic therapeutic tape (KT tape), the NVSL did not adopt this rule change for the 2026 season. Use of KT tape is not permitted to be worn in NVSL competition.

6. *Jewelry*

Similar to USA swimming, there are no rules which prohibit the wearing of jewelry except for the use of pacing devices (such as a watch), which is unlikely to occur in NVSL events.

7. *Team suits/caps*

A reminder to team reps, coaches, clerks of course, referees, and all other officials: Swimmers ARE PERMITTED to wear swimsuits with other team names or insignias (such as high school or club team names) but swimmers ARE NOT PERMITTED to wear caps which include the name or insignia of any team other than their NVSL team. See 1.o. and 1.p. on page 68 in the NVSL handbook.

8. *Notification of Disqualifications (DQs)*

Divisional Relay Carnival is a busy meet, and DQs may occur. Referees are reminded to provide notification of a DQ to a team representative as promptly as possible. Per the NVSL Referee Checklist, it is ideal, although not required, that the DQ notification occurs prior to the start of a subsequent race. Referees are reminded that DQs should be delivered throughout the meet and that team rep notification must take place even in the event of pending bad weather.

9. *Unusual Situations*

If a situation occurs and the process to resolve it is unclear, please confer with the Division Coordinator. If the DC is not sure how to proceed, they can call or text a member of the Officials Committee during the meet.