



August 19, 2026

NFHS Swimming and Diving Weekly Rule Interpretations

Notes: Before backstroke starting ledges may be used in any high school competition, the relevant state association MUST adopt the use of this device. It is recommended that coaches and athletes receive training in how to use the device appropriately.

SITUATION 1: Swimmers are observed doing the following: (a) placing the backstroke starting ledge upside down so that the thicker edge is on top, (b) placing the device with the edge against the wall so that the vertical surface is now horizontal, providing an 8-cm surface for the feet. **RULING:** Improper. If noticed prior to the start of the race, the starter/referee shall instruct the swimmer to install the device as intended. If not detected until after the race has started, no penalty shall be imposed.

STATE ASSOCIATION: State association policy should stipulate that the backstroke starting ledge be used per manufacturer's specifications and installed as intended (not upside-down for example).

COACHES: Swimmers should be trained/instructed in the appropriate installation of the backstroke starting ledge.

OFFICIALS: Officials should observe the device being installed and correct any inappropriate installations prior to the long whistle. If an athlete refuses to follow the official's instruction, that athlete may be sanctioned under Rule 3-6-2a and disqualified from the event. If the backstroke starting ledge is improperly installed and a violation is not detected prior to the start of the race, there is no current rule basis for penalizing the swimmer.



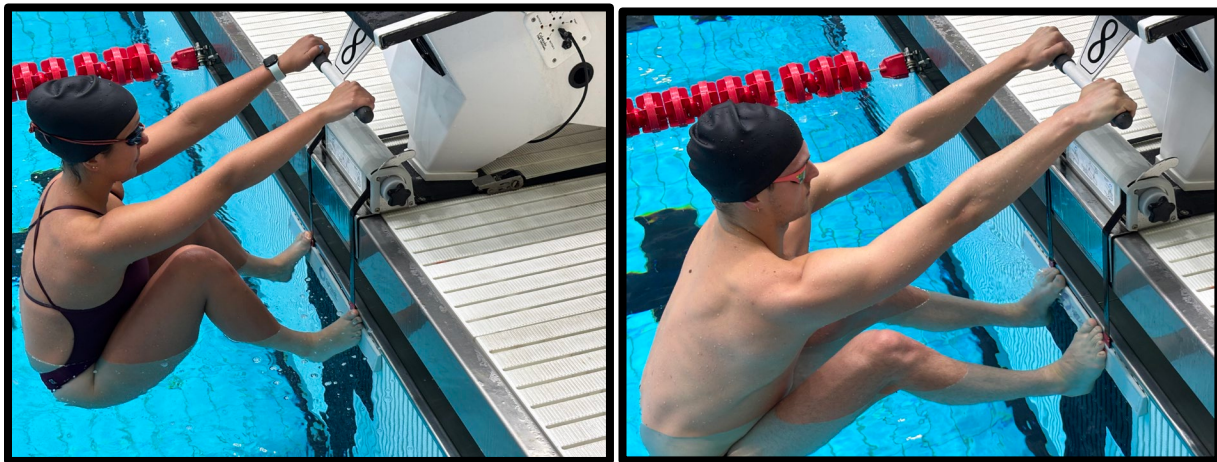
SITUATION 2: The following is observed: (a) The backstroke starting ledge is installed so that the top edge is 4 cm above the surface of the water; or (b) the top edge of the device is placed 12 inches below the water surface. **RULING:** For (a), the device is legal; for (b) the device is incorrectly installed, and the swimmer should be instructed to correct the violation prior to the start of the race.

STATE ASSOCIATION: Same as above. State association policy **MUST** follow the parameters of Rule 2-7-3.

COACHES: Same as above.

OFFICIALS: Same as above. There is no rule basis for penalizing a swimmer for having the device installed improperly; the **ONLY** way an athlete can be penalized in this context is if the official provides specific instruction to the athlete and the athlete refuses/fails to follow those instructions. Otherwise, there is no sanction for improper installation and then utilizing the device.

In instances where the device is above the surface of the water, officials must be aware of the position of the swimmers' toes. If the toes are curled over the gutter, that must be corrected prior to the starting signal; if it occurs after the signal, the swimmer must be disqualified. (8-2-1c)



Reprint of 2025-26 NFHS Swimming and Diving Points of Emphasis - Backstroke Ledge Education

As of the 2025-26 school year, NFHS state associations may adopt rules permitting the use of backstroke ledges during high school swimming competitions, provided the facility meets specific requirements, including a minimum water depth of 6 feet (1.84 meters) at the starting end to at least 16 feet, 5 inches (5 meters) from the wall. This decision is grounded in extensive research conducted by Indiana University, DePauw University, and input from the NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee, with the goal of reducing risks while aligning with national and international standards for competitive swimming. State associations that choose to permit use of backstroke starting ledges in their high school competitions must clearly articulate the importance of a teaching protocol implementation for

their high school competitors and for risk minimization. The implementation of backstroke ledges requires clear, structured education protocols. Swimmers must demonstrate proficiency in executing a backstroke start without the ledge before progressing to its use. Coaches should ensure athletes are familiar with the full backstroke start progression, which begins with mastering the shallow backstroke racing start. Swimmers must first practice getting into position with hands grasping either the gutter or the lowest bar on the starting block and placing both feet on the wall. Once this base skill is achieved, the coach may introduce the backstroke ledge, but only when the swimmer demonstrates sufficient strength and height to handle the additional skill safely. Progression to the ledge should be gradual, and the swimmer must exhibit a firm understanding of proper technique and safety procedures. The use of backstroke ledges should only occur during controlled swim practices, instructional sessions, supervised warm-ups, or competitions, ensuring the environment is safe and appropriate. Coaches should closely monitor swimmers' proficiency at each stage of the progression, ensuring that each athlete is physically and mentally prepared for the next step. The coach should assess whether the swimmer is sufficiently tall and strong to handle the backstroke bar or ledge before introducing them to these components. By following these guidelines and maintaining a clear focus on skill progression, safety and controlled environment practices, the use of backstroke ledges can be safely integrated into high school swimming competitions and training sessions. Additional educational resources may be accessed via the swimming and diving page of NFHS.org.

NFHS Swimming and Diving Resources of the Week:

Backstroke Ledge FAQ - <https://nfhs.org/sports/swimming-diving/resources>

Teaching Starts Using the Backstroke Ledge - <https://nfhs.org/sports/swimming-diving/resources>