

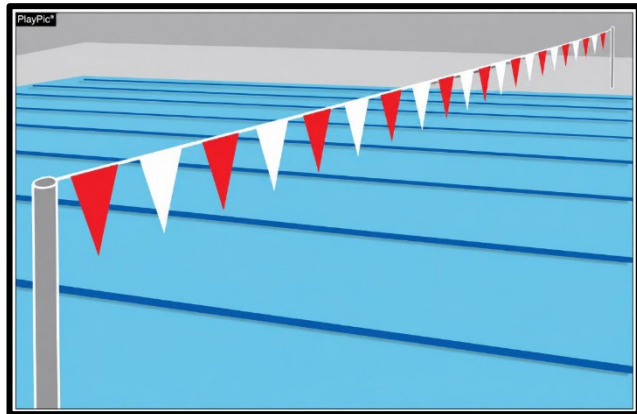


September 9, 2026

NFHS Swimming and Diving Weekly Rule Interpretations

SITUATION 1: The backstroke flags at West Creek High School are comprised of pennants that are 5" wide and 8" long; each lane has 3 pennants. To meet the requirements of Rule 2-7-6, West Creek staff have stapled paper 8" x 16" pennants over the existing pennants in the visiting team's lanes. The referee permits competition in all events involving backstroke.

RULING: Incorrect. Unlike lap counting devices where competition is conducted when only visiting team athletes are provided with the device, backstroke flags are required equipment for safety reasons. The protection of all swimmers is essential; therefore, all lanes must be equipped with flags meeting rule specifications. For not providing backstroke flags which meet rule specifications, the host team shall be disqualified from the events which required backstroke flags (200-yard medley relay, 200-yard IM, 100-yard back); those events are not contested. Visiting team athletes receiving points in these events must be designated and charged with participation according to Rule 3-2.



STATE ASSOCIATION: Schools should be provided with detailed safety-compliance information for all sports contested under the association's jurisdiction. NFHS Swimming and Diving Rules 2 and 9 provide such information for swimming and diving.

COACHES: Safety equipment should be present and properly operating for all practice sessions during the swimming and diving season.

OFFICIALS: The absence of equipment that does not comply with rule requirements places limitations on conducting certain events in high school, swimming and diving. While some such situations may be waived by prior mutual consent, the absence of legal backstroke flags CANNOT be waived. (Rule 2-1)

2026 Point of Emphasis

Backstroke Flags - Meet officials shall ensure the backstroke flags are in the correct position before the start of all backstroke and medley events as well as during warm-up. The principal concern is the proper location of the backstroke flag poles since correct placement of these flags is significant for athlete safety. In pools where both yard and meter races are conducted along the same course, this is especially

critical. The distance separating the two is approximately 15 inches. Prior to the start of competition officials must carefully examine the location of the backstroke flags to ensure proper placement.

SITUATION 2: Timers are using their cell phones as manual timing devices to time races as required by Rule 6-3. The referee prohibits this on the grounds that phones are not proper stopwatches. **RULING:** Incorrect. Any timing device, if otherwise accurate, can meet the requirements of a manual timing device. See Rule 6-3-1b(2). Something labeled “stopwatch” is not required; the requirement for use of a manual timing device on each lane can be met by a wide range of the electronic devices currently available, including phones. The NFHS does not prohibit the use of cell phones as “manual watches.”

STATE ASSOCIATION: There is no NFHS rule that prohibits the use of cell phones or other electronic devices as “manual watches” and no requirement therein that such a device must bear the label “stopwatch.” However, for a variety of non-rule reasons, some states prohibit phones at or behind the starting platforms due to concerns about intrusions into swimmer privacy. In such cases, phones would not be permitted as timing devices.

OFFICIALS: Officials must ensure that the rule requirement for a manual timing device in each lane (see Rule 6-3-4) is met for all meets. Certain devices, such as phones, may be disallowed by state association policy, and officials MUST be aware of and follow/enforce such guidelines. In addition, officials should carefully monitor activities in the starting area. School administrators and meet officials jointly share responsibility for protecting the well-being of the student-athletes under their supervision.

SITUATION 3: The backstroke grab bar in lane 4 has broken off the starting block and the remaining lanes have grab bars. A) Since the home team competes in lanes 2, 4 and 6, the official allows the use of the grab bars in the other lanes. B) The official prohibits all competitors from using the grab bars. C) The official requires all events to start from the deck. **RULING:** A and C are incorrect. The host team cannot take the penalty and allow others to utilize the grab bars if they are not available to all competitors. If the starting blocks are otherwise safe the starting platforms may be utilized for the forward start. B is the correct ruling.

STATE ASSOCIATION: State associations should make sure all schools provide safe equipment.

COACHES: Coaches should conduct regular maintenance surveys and make sure that the facility and equipment is in working order. When deficits are noted, they should be reported to the school administration and opponents.

OFFICIALS: Officials should make note of any deficiencies in the facility and contact the appropriate individual to facilitate remediation. Any deficiencies should be addressed during the pre-meet conference.

SITUATION 4: Due to wear-and-tear and breakage, Central High School only has usable lap counting devices for their last home meet of the season. This is sufficient to provide devices for the visiting team swimmers in the 500-yard freestyle. The Central High School coach indicates that her swimmers will compete without counters but insists that all participants in the event are eligible to score points. **RULING:** Correct. Rule 2-7-7 PENALTY stipulates that under these conditions, the host team swimmers may compete and score points, provided each visiting swimmer is provided with a lap counting device.

COACHES: When equipment deteriorates, coaches should do everything possible to replace or devise acceptable alternatives to inoperative devices. Unlike some other pieces of equipment, hand-made lap counting devices are acceptable for use in the 500-yard freestyle.

OFFICIALS: Officials must carefully differentiate the two conditions outlined in 2-7-7 PENALTY. If insufficient devices are available for ALL visiting swimmers, no host team swimmer may score. However, if each visitor is provided with a device, then both visiting and host team swimmers are eligible to score.



NFHS Swimming and Diving Resources of the Week:

Swimming and Diving Championships and Large Meet Administration -

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

2026-27 Swimming and Diving Comments on the Rules -

<https://nfhs.org/resources/sports/swimming-and-diving-comments-on-the-rules-2026-27>