

Effective September 21, 2005, USA-S adopted new rules for the backstroke and breaststroke. Although the new rules were issued with accompanying interpretations, much discussion has taken place with respect to the new rules. To further clarify the intent of the rule changes I have passed our questions along to Bruce Stratton, Chair of the USA-S Rules and Regulations Committee. The Rules and Regulations Committee is the final authority on interpreting the rules from Part One of the rulebook, and thus we need to follow these rulings.

Situation A – Backstroke

The just issued change to rule 101.3.3 (backstroke turn) has generated quite a bit comment. The basic thrust of many of these comments is that the rule change itself seems to eliminate the requirement for a continuous turning action once the swimmer goes past vertical towards the breast at the turn. While the interpretation makes it clear that we are to continue interpreting the rule as we always have, Bruce has addressed the requirement for a continuous turning action as follows:

Bruce Stratton's Comments

The change does not eliminate the requirement for a continuous turning action!!!

The change to 101.3.3 simply removes a sentence that was misleading because swimmers could always continue to kick during the continuous turning action without it being an infraction. The deleted sentence caused confusion because it was being interpreted by some to mean that no kicking could take place after the shoulders turn past vertical towards the breast. The infraction has really always been that there can be no gliding (with or without kicks) after turning on the back and before initiating the arm pulls; and there can be no gliding (with or without kicks) after the completion of the arm pull and before executing the turn.

The second sentence of 101.3.3 says that the shoulders may be turned past vertical toward the breast after which a "continuous" single or simultaneous double arm may be used to "execute" the turn. The word "continuous" requires, as it always has, that the arm pull must be part of the continuous action and therefore must occur immediately after the shoulders turn past vertical (i.e. no gliding before the arm pull). The word "execute" requires, as it always has, that the arm pull execute the turn and therefore, the turn must be executed at the end of the arm pull (i.e. no gliding after the arm pull and before the turn). This second sentence was, and is, the basis for no gliding.

Both of the examples you provided would be considered infractions, not because they kicked, but because they glided (again, with or without the kick) either before the arm pull or after the arm pull.

No matter how carefully a rule is worded, someone will always try to find a way to attempt to interpret it differently. The intent of the rule is what is important and I guess is one of the reasons we have a Rules Committee to make the interpretations and we have an Officials Committee to help educate officials of the interpreted intent.

Situation B – Breaststroke

Significant discussion has also taken place with respect to rule 101.1 (breaststroke). This discussion has centered on 1) whether or not the kick portion of the rule requires the swimmer to be wholly submerged if the swimmer elects to perform the butterfly kick during or at the end of the first arm pull-down and 2) whether or not the insertion of the requirement that the legs be in the "same horizontal plane" is meant to result in a material change. Bruce has addressed these concerns as follows:

Bruce Stratton's Comments

1) The "wholly submerged" was and continues to be permissive. It is not required to be submerged. The newly allowed butterfly kick is part of that whole portion of the stroke and therefore the "wholly submerged" is permissive with respect to the butterfly kick also. The only

intended change from the stroke as previously swum and officiated is that of allowing the butterfly kick during or at the end of the pull down.

The feet breaking the surface of the water during the upswing of the feet prior to the downward butterfly kick would not be violation when it is done in conjunction with the first pull-out or at the start as the intent of the rule change was to allow a butterfly kick followed by the normal breaststroke kick.

2) The insertion of the words "in the same horizontal plane" was intended to align the rule with FINA. Remember that the rule applies to the legs and not the hips, just as the similar requirement for the arms applies to the arms and not the shoulders. While it certainly is possible for the legs to not be in the same horizontal plane, it would have to be pretty extreme to make that call and still give the benefit of the doubt to the swimmer. However, this could result in a disqualification that previously was not one.

Hopefully, this information will help provide additional clarify the rule changes for athletes, coaches, and officials. Remember that the intent of the rules is to "provide fair and equitable standards of competition" for all the athletes. For this to occur, officials must also apply a common interpretation to the rules, and that interpretation ultimately rests with the USA-S Rules and Regulations Committee. Please familiarize yourself with these new rules and interpretations, and please pass them along to all our athletes, coaches, and officials.