

## **Our Kid Initiative – Special Meeting**

**March 4, 2026 – 11:00AM Eastern**

**VIA Zoom**

### **Attendees**

Jay Thomas – OKI Chair	Pat Lusford-OKI Chair-Emeritus	Craig Hunter-AQUA TSC Chair
Kathy Casey - USMS	Ron Van Pool – USA-S	Derek Paul – USA-S
Jamie Cahn – USA-S	Dianne Hicks-Hughs	Christina Fox
Herb Schwab – USA-S	Sandy Searcy - NFHS	Eddie Hughes - YMCA
Kathleen Scandary – USA-S	Christina Fox - USMS	Judy Sharkey – USA-S
Clark Hammond – USA-S		

### **World Aquatics Competition Regulations Update**

Jay Thomas - Our Kids Initiative Chairman called the meeting to order at 11:00. Jay welcomed the attendees, gave brief opening remarks, and introduced the guest speaker Craig Hunter, the Chairperson of the World Aquatics Technical Swimming Committee, to discuss the new Competition Regulations. Jay also mentioned that he had sent out relevant documents, including the cover letter from the World Aquatics Executive Director - Brent Nowicki, the new 2026 Competition Regulations as well as the previous version from January 2025.

### **World Aquatics Competition Rule Updates**

Craig explained that the new World Aquatics Competition Regulations was a complete re-write and were created to simplify and clarify the rules, with one goal being to reduce potential conflicts and appeals. He emphasized that the regulations, while rewritten for clarity, do not significantly change how rules are applied in competitions. Craig stressed that officials should prioritize giving swimmers the benefit of the doubt when there is uncertainty. He also highlighted the new appeals process, which grants more authority to Referees' decisions. He also mentioned the inclusion of new regulations regarding conflicts for officials of interest in the updated Competition Regulations.

### **Swimming Competition Rules Update**

Craig discussed updates to swimming competition regulations, including a new FAQ document from the Integrity Unit to clarify rules. He explained changes to early initiation of the start protocols, allowing high speed camera video review confirm early starts no longer requires both Referee and Starter agreement. Craig also addressed updates to call room procedures, and the inclusion of 400-meter freestyle races now require lap counting and

warning signals in both long and short course swimming. He emphasized that lap counters can be placed in the water or at deck level. Responsibility has been assigned to Judges of Stroke who are now responsible for ensuring backstroke flags are correctly positioned. This will prevent safety issues in backstroke and medley swimming.

Craig discussed the importance of defining roles and protocols for warm-up supervisors and the need for consistent approaches to safety and pool usage during warm-ups. He highlighted changes in the wording for seeding of heat semi-finals and finals, and introduced new standard wording for starting procedures. Craig also explained modifications to the rules for freestyle, butterfly, and breaststroke, emphasizing the need for consistency across strokes and the use of video judging at World Aquatics Championships.

### **Swimming Judging Rule Updates**

Craig discussed changes to swimming judging and world record procedures. He emphasized that the only changes to breaststroke and butterfly judging are the initiation of the downward butterfly kick and being totally submerged in the final 5 meters while reaching for the finish wall in butterfly. Craig mentioned that the legal team made some wording mistakes in the draft rules, which need to be corrected. He also highlighted that relay aspects have been consolidated into one section, and the use of AOE and semi-automatic officiating equipment has been simplified. Craig explained that in mixed relays, the first athlete can now set a World Record or World Junior Record. He reminded Referees and competition managers to familiarize themselves with the new world record application process and pool certification documents. Craig also noted that the use of tape is now allowed, but no more than 2 fingers or toes can be taped at any one time.

### **Swimming Safety and Competition Rules**

Craig discussed the use of nasal strips and body taping in swimming competitions, clarifying that nasal strips are allowed despite being a marketing fad, while body taping is permissible except for adhesive substances like glue. He highlighted the importance of these medical and safety requirements, which have been moved to the swimming section for better visibility. Craig also shared a tragic incident in Egypt where a young swimmer drowned during a national championship, leading to the arrest of officials and the formation of an investigative body by World Aquatics to prevent similar incidents.

### **Safety and Fairness Protocols**

Craig emphasized the importance of referees ensuring fairness in swimming competitions while leaving lifeguard and safety responsibilities to organizers and meet management. He suggested that referees should speak with competition directors and meet managers

before each session to confirm that trained lifeguards are stationed around the pool, ready to respond if needed. Craig highlighted the necessity of vigilance and alertness among officials and proposed that lifeguard presence and briefing become part of the referee briefing in future versions.

### **Swimming Safety Rule Updates**

Craig presented on swimming-specific medical and safety requirements, emphasizing that all questions and queries should be directed to Namhee Cho at World Aquatics, who will pass them to the Technical Swimming Committee for interpretation and approval by the World Aquatics Bureau.

Jay requested updates from rulemaking groups, including USA Swimming represented by Derek, who explained their process for implementing rule changes to align with World Aquatics. Derek mentioned that USA Swimming would update their website with the latest rules and changes, while physical rulebooks would be updated in the next version.

### **New Swimming Rules Implementation**

The meeting focused on the implementation of new rules for swimming competitions, with Craig explaining that World Aquatics has set a strict implementation date, causing challenges for member federations like Great Britain. Sandy announced that rule changes, including submersion rules for free and butterfly swimmers, will be discussed at the March 22-24 meeting and will take effect during the 2026-27 season. Craig also mentioned that new disqualification report cards and check sheets will be available on the World Aquatics website in the coming weeks.

### **Questions, Discussion and Closing**

Clarification by Craig that:

The prohibition regarding the use of tape (including therapeutic elastic tape) has been removed. The rule which permits tape on one (1) or two (2) fingers or toes (including to bind together two fingers or toes) if use of the tape is required to treat or protect an injury to a finger or toe - remains in force.

Remember to always give the swimmers the benefit of the doubt.

Jay Thomas closed the meeting by thanking Craig for sharing his time with the diverse OKI group. He thanked the members of OKI for their continued commitment making swimming better for the athletes.

The meeting was closed at 11:49AM Eastern Time.

