

PART IV

FINA OPEN WATER SWIMMING RULES 2023 - 2025

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OWS 1 DEFINITIONS

OWS 1.1 OPEN WATER SWIMMING shall be defined as any competition that takes place in rivers, lakes, oceans, or water channels except for 10km events.

OWS 1.1.1 MARATHON SWIMMING shall be defined as any 10km event in open water competitions.

OWS 1.2 The age limit for all FINA Open Water Swimming events must be at least 14 years of age. The age for all competitors will be considered as at 31st December of the year of the competition.

OWS 2 OFFICIALS

The following officials shall be appointed at Open Water Swimming competitions:

- A Chief Referee (one per race)
- Referees (2 minimum, additional Referees proportional to race entries)
- Chief Timekeeper plus 2 Timekeepers
- Chief Finish Judge plus 2 Finish Judges
- Safety Officer
- Medical Officer
- Course Officer
- Clerk of the Course
- Race Judges (one per competitor) except for events with a course of 10 km or less
- Turn Judges (one per alteration of Course)
- Feeding Platform Judge (when feeding platforms are used)
- Starter
- Announcer
- Recorder

NOTE: No official can act in more than one role simultaneously. They may only undertake a new role after all of the obligations of their previous role have been fulfilled.

OWS 3 DUTIES OF OFFICIALS

THE CHIEF REFEREE shall:

OWS 3.1 have full control and authority over all officials and shall approve their assignments and instruct them regarding all special features or regulations related to the competition. The Chief Referee shall enforce all the Rules and decisions of FINA and shall decide all questions relating to the actual conduct of the competition, the final settlement of which is not otherwise covered by these Rules.

OWS 3.2 have authority to intervene in the competition at any stage to ensure that FINA Rules are observed.

OWS 3.2.1 In case of hazardous conditions that jeopardize the safety of the competitors and the officials, in conjunction with the Safety Officer he can stop the race.

OWS 3.3 adjudicate on all protests related to the competition in progress.

OWS 3.4 give a decision in cases where the Finish Judges' decisions and times recorded do not agree.

OWS 3.5 signal to competitors, by raised flag and short blasts on a whistle, that the start is imminent and when satisfied indicate by pointing the flag at the Starter that the competition may commence.

OWS 3.6 disqualify any competitor for any violation of the Rules that he personally observes, or which is reported to him by other authorised officials. Notwithstanding the provisions of OWS 5.3 hereof, the Chief Referee may decide to enforce the disqualification at the end of the race.

OWS 3.7 ensure that all necessary officials for the conduct of the competition are at their respective posts. He may appoint substitutes for any who are absent, incapable of acting or found to be inefficient. He may appoint additional officials if considered necessary.

OWS 3.8 receive all reports prior to the start of the race and at the conclusion of the race from the Clerk of the Course, Recorder, Course Officer and Safety Officer to ensure all competitors are accounted for.

THE REFEREES shall:

OWS 3.9 have authority to intervene in competition at any stage to ensure that FINA Rules are observed.

OWS 3.10 disqualify any competitor for any violation of the Rules that he personally observes.

THE STARTER shall:

OWS 3.11 start the race in accordance to OWS 4 following the signal by the Chief Referee.

THE CHIEF TIMEKEEPER shall:

OWS 3.12 assign at least two Timekeepers to their positions for the start and finish.

OWS 3.13 ensure that a time check is made to allow all persons to synchronise their watches with the official running clocks 15 minutes before start time.

OWS 3.14 collect from each Timekeeper the time recorded for each competitor, and, if necessary, inspect their watches.

OWS 3.15 record or examine the official time for each competitor.

TIMEKEEPERS shall:

OWS 3.16 take the time of each competitor/s assigned. The watches must have memory and printout capability and shall be certified correct to the satisfaction of the Management Committee.

OWS 3.17 start their watches at the starting signal, and only stop their watches when instructed by the Chief Timekeeper.

OWS 3.18 promptly after each finish record the time of each competitor and turn it over to the Chief Timekeeper.

NOTE: When Automatic Officiating Equipment is used, the same complement of hand timers is to be used.

THE CHIEF FINISH JUDGE shall:

OWS 3.19 assign each Judge to a position.

OWS 3.20 record and communicate any decision received from the Referees during the competition.

OWS 3.21 collect after the race, signed results sheets from each Finish Judge and establish the result and placing which shall be sent directly to the Chief Referee.

OWS 3.22 confirm to each race judge their escort boat and instruct them in their duties.

OWS 3.23 collect after the race, signed sheets from each Race Judge of their observations during the race which shall be sent directly to the Chief Referee.

FINISH JUDGES (two) shall:

OWS 3.24 be positioned in line with the finish where they shall have at all times a clear view of the finish.

OWS 3.25 record after each finish the placing of the competitors according to the assignment given.

NOTE: Finish Judges shall not act as Timekeepers in the same event

EACH RACE JUDGE shall:

OWS 3.26 be positioned in an escort safety craft (where applicable), assigned by random draw prior to the start, so as to be able to observe, at all times, his appointed competitor.

OWS 3.27 ensure at all times that the Rules of competition are complied with, violations being recorded in writing and reported to a Referee at the earliest opportunity.

OWS 3.28 have the power to order a competitor from the water upon expiry of any time limit so ordered by the Chief Referee.

OWS 3.29 ensure that his appointed competitor does not take unfair advantage or commit

unsporting impediment on another competitor and if the situation requires instruct a competitor to maintain clearance from any other competitor.

TURN JUDGES shall:

OWS 3.30 be positioned so as to ensure all competitors execute the alterations in course as indicated in the competition information documents and as given at the pre-race briefing.

OWS 3.31 record any infringement of the turn procedures on the record sheets provided, then immediately communicate the infringement to the Chief Referee.

OWS 3.32 promptly upon completion of the event deliver the signed record sheet to the Chief Referee

THE SAFETY OFFICER shall:

OWS 3.33 be responsible to the Chief Referee for all aspects of safety related to the conduct of the competition.

OWS 3.34 check that the entire course, with special regard to the start and finish areas, is safe, suitable, and free of any obstruction.

OWS 3.35 be responsible for ensuring that sufficient powered safety craft are available during the competition so as to provide full safety backup to the escort safety craft.

OWS 3.36 provide prior to the competitions to all competitors a tide/current chart clearly indicating the time of tide changes on the course and showing the effect of tides or current on a competitor's progress along the course.

OWS 3.37 in conjunction with the Medical Officer advise the Chief Referee if, in their opinion, conditions are unsuitable for staging the competition and make recommendations for the modification of the course or the manner in which the competition is conducted.

OWS 3.38 monitor temperature conditions periodically during the race.

THE MEDICAL OFFICER shall:

OWS 3.39 be responsible to the Chief Referee for all medical aspects related to the competition and competitors.

OWS 3.40 inform the local medical facilities of the nature of the competition and ensure that any casualties can be evacuated to medical facilities at the earliest opportunity.

OWS 3.41 in conjunction with the Safety Officer, advise the Chief Referee if, in their opinion, conditions are unsuitable for staging the competition and make recommendations for the modification of the course or the manner in which the competition is conducted.

THE COURSE OFFICER shall:

OWS 3.42 be responsible to the Management Committee for the correct survey of the course.

OWS 3.43 ensure the start and finish areas are correctly marked and all equipment has been correctly installed and, where applicable, is in working order.

OWS 3.44 ensure all course alteration points are correctly marked and manned prior to the commencement of the competition.

OWS 3.45 with the Referee and Safety Officer inspect the course and markings prior to the commencement of competition.

OWS 3.46 ensure that Turn Judges are in position prior to the start of the competition and report this to the Chief Referee.

THE CLERK OF THE COURSE shall:

OWS 3.47 assemble and prepare competitors prior to each event and ensure proper reception facilities at the finish are available for all competitors.

OWS 3.48 ensure each competitor is identified correctly with their race number and that all competitors have trimmed fingernails and toenails and are not wearing any jewellery, including watches.

OWS 3.49 be certain all competitors are present, in the assembly area, at the required time prior to the start.

OWS 3.50 keep competitors and officials informed of the time remaining before the start at suitable intervals until the last five minutes, during which one-minute warnings shall be given.

OWS 3.51 be responsible for ensuring that all clothing and equipment left in the start area is transported to the finish area and kept in safekeeping.

OWS 3.52 ensure that all competitors leaving the water at the finish have the basic equipment required for their well-being should their own attendants not be present at that time.

THE RECORDER shall:

OWS 3.53 record withdrawals from the competition, enter results on official forms, and maintain records for team awards as appropriate.

EACH FEEDING PLATFORM JUDGE shall:

OWS 3.54 be responsible for the management of the activity and the competitors authorised representatives present on the platform, in accordance with FINA rules.

OWS 4 THE START

OWS 4.1 All Open Water competitions shall start with all competitors wearing an approved swim cap and standing on a fixed platform or in water depth sufficient for them to commence swimming on the start signal.

OWS 4.1.1 When starting from a fixed platform competitors shall be assigned a position on the platform, as determined by random draw.

OWS 4.2 The Clerk of the Course shall keep competitors and officials informed of the time before start at suitable intervals and at one-minute intervals for the last five minutes.

OWS 4.3 When the numbers of entries dictate the start shall be segregated in the Men's and Women's competitions.

OWS 4.4 The start line shall be clearly defined by either overhead apparatus or by removable equipment at water level.

OWS 4.5 The Chief Referee shall indicate by a flag held upright and short blasts on a whistle when the start is imminent and indicate that the competition is under Starter's orders by pointing the flag at the starter.

OWS 4.6 The Starter shall be positioned so as to be clearly visible to all competitors.

OWS 4.6.1 On the Starter's command "take your marks" all competitors shall take up a starting position immediately in line with the start line where a platform is not used, or with at least one foot at the front of the platform.

OWS 4.6.2 The Starter will give the starting signal when he/she considers all competitors are ready.

OWS 4.7 The start signal shall be both audible and visual.

OWS 4.8 If in the opinion of the Chief Referee an unfair advantage has been gained at the start the offending competitor will be given a yellow or red flag in accordance with OWS 5.3.

OWS 4.9 All escort safety craft shall be stationed prior to the start so as not to interfere with any competitor, and if picking up their competitor from behind shall navigate in such a way as not to manoeuvre through the field of competitors.

OWS 4.10 Although they may start together, in all other respects the men's and women's competitions shall be treated as separate events.

OWS 5 THE RACE

OWS 5.1 All Open Water competitions shall be Freestyle events and competitors are required to complete the whole course, respecting all designated turning buoys and course boundaries.

OWS 5.2 Race Judges shall instruct any competitor who is, in their opinion, taking unfair advantage by pacing or slip streaming with the escort craft to move clear

OWS 5.3 Disqualification Procedure

OWS 5.3.1 If in the Opinion of the Chief Referee or Referees, any competitor, or competitor's approved representative, or escort safety craft, takes advantage by committing any violation of the rules or by making intentional contact with any competitor, the following procedure shall apply:

1st Infringement:

A yellow flag and a card bearing the competitor's number shall be raised to indicate and to inform the competitor that he is in violation of the Rules.

2nd Infringement:

A red flag and a card bearing the competitor's number shall be raised by the Referee (OWS 3.6) to indicate and to inform the competitor that he is for the second time in violation of the Rules. The competitor shall be disqualified.

OWS 5.3.2 If in the opinion of a Referee, an action of a competitor or an escort safety craft, or a competitor's approved representative is deemed to be 'unsporting' the Referee shall disqualify the competitor concerned immediately. He must leave the water immediately and be placed in an escort craft and take no further part in the race.

OWS 5.4 Escort safety craft shall manoeuvre so as not to obstruct or place them directly ahead of any competitor and not take unfair advantage by pacing or slip streaming.

OWS 5.5 Escort safety craft shall attempt to maintain a constant position so as to station the competitor at, or forward of, the mid-point of the escort safety craft.

OWS 5.6 Standing on the bottom during a race shall not disqualify a competitor, but they may not walk or jump.

OWS 5.7 With the exception of Rule OWS 5.6 above competitor shall not receive support from any fixed or floating object and shall not intentionally touch or be touched by their escort safety craft or crew therein.

OWS 5.7.1 Rendering assistance by an official medical officer to a competitor in apparent distress should always supersede official rules of disqualification through "intentional contact" with a swimmer (Rule OWS 3.1).

OWS 5.8 For races where escort boats are used, each escort safety craft shall contain: a Race Judge, a person of the competitors' choice, and the minimum crew required to operate the escort safety craft.

OWS 5.8.1 Each escort safety craft shall display the competitors' competition number so as to be easily seen from either side of the escort safety craft and the national flag of the competitor's Federation.

OWS 5.9 Each safety craft shall contain appropriately qualified safety personnel and the minimum crew required to operate the safety craft.

OWS 5.10 No competitor shall be permitted to use or wear any device which may be an aid to their speed, endurance, or buoyancy. Approved swimsuit, goggles, a maximum of two (2) caps, nose clip and earplugs may be used.

OWS 5.11 Competitors shall be allowed to use grease or other such substances providing these are not, in the opinion of the Chief Referee, excessive.

OWS 5.12 The pacing of a competitor by another person entering the water is not permitted.

OWS 5.13 Coaching and the giving of instructions by the approved competitor's representative on the feeding platform or in the escort safety craft is permitted. No whistle shall be allowed.

OWS 5.14 When taking sustenance competitors may use Rule OWS 5.6 provided Rule OWS 5.7 is not infringed.

OWS 5.15 No objects can be thrown from the feeding platform to the competitors, including sustenance. The competitors shall receive their feeding directly from their representative by a feeding pole or by hand.

OWS 5.16 Feeding poles are not to exceed 5m in length when extended. No objects, rope or wire may hang off the end of feeding poles except national flags. National flags are allowed to be attached to the feeding pole but may not exceed the size of 30cm x 20 cm.

OWS 5.17 In all events, time limits shall apply as follows from the finish time of the first competitors:

15 minutes per 5km (or part thereof) up to a maximum time limit of 120 minutes.

OWS 5.17.1 Competitors who do not finish the course within the time limit shall be removed from the water except that the Chief Referee may allow a competitor outside the time limit to complete the course but not be eligible for any points or prizes.

OWS 5.18 Emergency Abandonment

OWS 5.18.1 In cases of emergency abandonment of races of 10 km or less, the race will be restarted from the beginning at the earliest possible moment.

OWS 5.18.2 In cases of emergency abandonment for any race longer than 10km, the final ranking will be as reported by the Chief Referee. If 2 hours of the race have not been completed, it will be restarted from the beginning at the earliest moment possible.

OWS 6 THE FINISH OF THE RACE

OWS 6.1 Escort safety craft should be stationed at the approach to and entrance of the finish lane to ensure that only the escort safety craft authorised to do so enter or cross this entrance.

OWS 6.2 The final places will be determined by the Chief Referee based upon the finish judges' report and the finish video tape.

OWS 6.3 It is mandatory for all competitors to wear a microchip transponder on each wrist throughout the race. If a competitor loses a transponder the Race Judge or other authorised Official, will immediately inform the Chief Referee who will instruct the responsible Official on the water to issue a replacement transponder. Any competitor who finishes the race without at least one transponder will be disqualified.

OWS 6.4 When, at the finish of an Open Water Swimming competition, a vertical wall is available, competitors must touch the vertical wall to finish the race. Any competitor who does not touch the vertical wall will be disqualified.

OWS 6.5 The Finish Judges and Timekeepers shall be placed so as to be able to observe the finish at all times. The area in which they are stationed should be for their exclusive use.

OWS 6.6 Every effort should be made to ensure that the competitor's representative can get from the escort safety craft to meet the swimmer as they leave the water.

OWS 6.7 Upon leaving the water some competitors may require assistance. Competitors should only be touched or handled if they clearly display a need, or ask for assistance.

OWS 6.8 A member of the medical team should inspect the competitors as they leave the water. A chair, in which the competitor can sit while an assessment is made, should be provided.

OWS 6.9 Once cleared by the medical member, competitors should be given access to refreshment.