

Sue: Here's what the rule says:

## **2006 USA RULES**

### **101.3 BACKSTROKE** (effective 09-21-05)

.1 **Start** — The swimmers shall line up in the water facing the starting end, with both hands placed on the gutter or on the starting grips. Standing in or on the gutter, placing the toes above the lip of the gutter, or bending the toes over the lip of the gutter, before or after the start, is prohibited.

.2 **Stroke** — The swimmer shall push off on his back and continue swimming on the back throughout the race. Some part of the swimmer must break the surface of the water throughout the race, except it is permissible for the swimmer to be completely submerged during the turn, at the finish and for a distance of not more than 15 meters (16.4 yards) after the start and after each turn. By that point, the head must have broken the surface of the water.

.3 **Turns** — Upon completion of each length, some part of the swimmer must touch the wall. During the turn the shoulders may be turned past the vertical toward the breast after which a continuous single arm pull or a continuous simultaneous double arm pull may be used to execute the turn. The swimmer must have returned to a position on the back upon leaving the wall.

.4 **Finish** — Upon the finish of the race, the swimmer must touch the wall while on the back.

The difference between 101.3 and NCAA Rule 2-2-1 is *only* in the area of how the swimmer should be judged if and when the shoulders rotate past vertical toward the breast before making contact with the end of the pool at the completion of any length except the last length. The NCAA rule says " the swimmer's upper shoulder is allowed (but not required) to rotate past the vertical toward the prone position before the touch is completed provided such rotation is accompanied by **an immediate initiation of the turning action.**" (emphasis mine). The equivalent 101.3 wording is "...the shoulders may be turned past the vertical toward the breast after which a **continuous single arm pull or a continuous simultaneous double arm pull** may be used to execute the turn." (emphasis mine).

In the NCAA rules, which we have followed in past years, the key element was the **immediate initiation** of the turn. This meant that once the swimmer turned to their breast, they had to take either a single one-arm pull or a single, simultaneous two-arm pull immediately. Once that pull had been taken, the only remaining criteria were that some part of the swimmer's body touched the wall and that the swimmer's body position was past vertical toward the breast when her feet left the wall.

**The USA Swimming requirement is significantly more restrictive!** Once the swimmer has turned past vertical toward the breast, they must execute a **continuous turning action**. This means that the arm must be pulling the swimmer into the turn, or that the swimmer must actually be in the turning action (head down in tuck, etc) at all times.

For officials, the key point to focus on during the backstroke turn is the arm that is doing the pulling. As long as that arm keeps moving with a continuous transition into the flip turning action, the swimmer is legal, and should not be disqualified. If, however, the swimmer either delays in initiating the pull after turning toward his breast, *or*, completes the pull and stops arm motion at the hip without going into the tuck for the turn, then there is no "continuous turning motion", and the swimmer should be disqualified. Note that the old NCAA rule allowed swimmers who completed their pull early to continue to kick independent of the turning motion prior to going into the tuck for turn. Such independent action *is not permitted* under the USA Swimming Rule.

The USA rule *does not*, however, rule out continued kicking into the wall during the turn, as long as that kicking is part of the continuous turning motion. So as long as that arm is moving – however slowly – the swimmer should be deemed to be continuously turning and *should not be disqualified*.

Any swimmer who contacts the wall while attempting to comply with the rule should be deemed to be compliant. Thus, a swimmer who misjudges her strokes and strikes the wall with her head after turning to her breast should not be disqualified.

The USA Swim Officials training video is very good at distinguishing legal turns.

YMCA Referees should carefully instruct S&T officials about these distinctions before the meet to make sure we're all on the same page.

If individuals are confused, feel free to have them contact me and I'll try to explain.

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