

TO: USMS Board of Directors, Executive Committee, Local Masters Swimming Committees, National Office, Affiliate Organization Representatives

FROM: Charles Cockrell, USMS Rules Committee Chair

SUBJECT: Interpretation of USMS Rules 102.3 and 102.5 regarding age groups at USMS sanctioned meets.

DATE: January 23, 2017

Background

In November 2016, San Diego-Imperial LMSC raised a question regarding the USA Masters Games, scheduled to be conducted in San Diego, CA in July 2017. The USA Masters Games is representing that the meet will be sanctioned by United States Masters Swimming (USMS) through SI LMSC.

The question posed to the Rules Committee concerned age groups offered at USMS sanctioned meets. The USA Masters Games advertises a minimum age of 21 and the entry information specifies age groups of 21-24, 25-29, etc. The question is whether this arrangement is permitted under USMS rules.

I note that this is the first time on record that the Rules Committee has been asked to provide an interpretation of the rules regarding age groups.

Additionally, in our research, we have been made aware of another meet conducted by an affiliate organization which has a different age eligibility policy from USMS. The Huntsman Senior Games, conducted in Utah and held in a 50-meter pool, is open to athletes age 50 and over. Our records show that this meet was first sanctioned in 2005. The meet has been recognized in some years and sanctioned in other years.

Our records also show that there are a small number of additional 50-and-over meets that have been sanctioned since 2005, but our records show that these have been held in 25-yard pools. (The significance of 25-yard pools versus 25-meter or 50-meter pools concerns the acceptance of world records and world top 10 submissions by FINA.) The vast majority of other "senior games" or similar meets open only to 50-and-over swimmers have been conducted as recognized meets.

Thus, we have determined that this question has a practical impact on two meets that we know are planned for 2017: the USA Masters Games and the Huntsman Senior Games.

The Rules Committee has thoroughly researched this issue, including the historical evolution and rationale behind the current rules, in order to determine the intent of our membership in adopting the current rules.

Therefore, in response to these questions and in accordance with USMS article 507.1.3 ("When necessary, the [rules] committee shall interpret and render opinions regarding any provision of the rules and regulations of USMS within the committee's jurisdiction as defined in article 601.1") and article 601.1.4 ("Rules Committee....Part 1: Swimming Rules and the Glossary..") the following is issued as an official interpretation of rules 102.5 and 102.3 as they pertain to USMS sanctioned meets.

Summary of Current Rules

- USMS 202.1.1G(1) says that "The conduct of a sanctioned event shall be in strict compliance with applicable USMS swimming rules and administrative regulations..." We provide for two exceptions to this requirement, which are for dual-sanctioned meets held with USA Swimming and FINA World Masters Championships held in the United States. Although the Rules Committee does not interpret part two, this is important context. Since there are no other exceptions listed, this implies that all other sanctioned meets must be conducted in accordance with USMS rules regardless of the host organization without exception.
- The preamble to part one says that "All competitive swimming events held under corporate sanction shall be conducted in accordance with the following rules..." This says that we cannot suspend or waive specific rules for sanctioned competitions (except as provided for in article 202.1.1G(1) or 506.3.10), regardless of the host or sponsoring organization.
- **Rule 102.5** says that "**Any event conducted must be offered for all age groups and both genders**". I note that there are multiple definitions of the word "event" in the glossary, but in the context of 102.5, we mean "a series of races in a given stroke and distance".
- **Rule 102.3** defines the age groups for individual events and relays starting at 18-24 for individual events, 72-99 for relays (for meets held in 25-meter and 50-meter pools), and 18+ for relays (for meets held in 25-yard pools).

Historical Context of Article 102.5

- USA Swimming has rule books archived online going back to 1981. Between 1981 and 1988, USMS rules were captured as an appendix in the USA Swimming rule book. From 1981 to 1988, the rule said "The following events may be conducted."
- Sometime between 1988 and 1996, the rule was changed to read "The following events may be conducted for each age group". In 1981, the youngest age group was 25-29. By 1988, it was changed to 19-24. Thus, the addition of "for each age group" follows several years of discussion and action to lower the minimum age for USMS membership and competition to be more inclusive. Records also indicate that changes were proposed to FINA to lower their minimum age during this time period.
- In 1998, the Championship Committee proposed a rule change that was adopted with the current language: "Any event conducted **must** be offered for all age groups and both genders." The rationale for the amendment says "**The existing rule opens the door to conducting some events for only some age groups or one gender.**" The purposeful change in language from "may" to "must" along with the stated rationale strongly suggests that the House of Delegates fully intended to adopt wording to **require** that all events at USMS sanctioned meets be offered to all age groups. Moreover, the amendment was listed as "housekeeping" which suggests that the membership did not consider this requirement to be a substantive departure from historical practice at the time.
- In 2006, there was a proposed amendment to 102.5 that would have amended the language to read "Any event listed in 102.5.1 and 102.5.2 must be offered for age groups....", but allowing 25-

meter events to be offered only for 75-and-over swimmers. This is only example of a proposed rule that would have permitted some events to be offered only for some age groups, and not others, at USMS sanctioned meets. This amendment was defeated.

- The current minimum age of 18 was adopted in 2004.

Additional Points

- USMS 202.2.1E lists the rules that must be followed for recognized meets and neither 102.5 nor 102.3 appear in this list. Thus, this question does not apply to recognized meets. Note, however, that FINA will not accept world records or world masters top 10 submissions from recognized meets.
- USMS article 506.3.10 gives the Board of Directors the authority to suspend a rule if such immediate action is deemed in the best interests of USMS. Such action requires the advice and consent of the appropriate committee(s). Suspension of a rule is only effective until the next meeting of the House of Delegates. The Rules Committee is prepared to consider a request to suspend rules 102.3 and 102.5 if such a request is submitted by the host organization or LMSC.
- Given that the current rule dates to 1998, it may be appropriate to consider changes to parts one and/or two that would provide a basis for meets conducted by affiliate organizations with different age eligibility policies. The rules committee is prepared to work with interested parties to draft legislation for consideration by the House of Delegates at the 2017 convention.

Official Interpretation

Given our analysis, the Rules Committee met via conference call on January 22, 2017 and approved the following official interpretation.

USMS 202.1.1G(1) says that "The conduct of a sanctioned event shall be in strict compliance with applicable USMS swimming rules and administrative regulations..." USMS Rule 102.5 says that "Any event conducted must be offered for all age groups and both genders". In the context of 102.5, we mean "a series of races in a given stroke and distance". Rule 102.3 defines the age groups for individual events and relays starting at 18-24 for individual events, 72-99 for relays (for meets held in 25-meter or 50-meter pools) and 18+ for relays (for meets held in 25-yard pools). The rules do not provide for any exceptions to tailor or restrict the age groups at sanctioned meets.

Therefore, all events conducted at USMS sanctioned meets must be offered for all of the age groups listed in 102.3. A format that limits or alters the age groups from those listed in 102.3 is not in compliance with USMS rules. Sponsoring organizations who are unable or unwilling to offer each and every event to all USMS age groups (as listed in 102.3) are not in compliance with part one rules, as required for all USMS sanctioned meets.

Per USMS 202.2.1E, compliance with rules 102.3 and 102.5 is not required for recognized meets.

Respectfully,

Charles Cockrell