



Virginia Swimming, Inc.  
Officials Committee  
**RECOMMENDED PRACTICE**

**WORKING WITH ATHLETES DIAGNOSED WITH ADHD**

**ISSUE:** Swimmers with ADHD may be especially prone to missing the start of their events and the questions have arisen as to whether ADHD should be handled as a disability and whether or not the referee should give special consideration to these athletes if they step up late or otherwise miss their race due to inattention on the athlete's part. This recommended practice provides answers to those questions.

**BACKGROUND:** Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), formerly referred to as attention-deficit disorder (ADD), is a group of disorders that begin in childhood and sometimes last into adulthood. ADHD is characterized by difficulty in paying attention and concentrating (inattention), sitting still (hyperactivity), and controlling impulsive behavior (impulsivity). There is disagreement as to whether or not ADHD is an over-diagnosed disorder, but our purpose is not to debate this point. Although ADHD is a legitimately recognized disorder, it is not a recognized disability. That ADHD is not a recognized disability has been confirmed with Lee Gibbs (Adapted Chairperson, VSI) and Randy Julian (Staff Liaison for USA-S Adapted Swim Committee).

**RECOMMENDED PRACTICE:** Because ADHD is not a recognized disability, no special accommodations or modifications need be made under Article 105 of the USA-S Rules and Regulations. While officials should be sympathetic to the special needs of these athletes, the primary responsibility for dealing with ADHD resides with the athlete, the athlete's parents, and the athlete's coach. Coaches should be made aware that the athlete has been diagnosed with ADHD and should be particularly attentive to making sure that the athlete reports on time to the Clerk-of-Course or behind the blocks. The coach may also need to make sure that the athlete promptly "steps up" on the long whistle command.

As always, the Referee should be attentive to extenuating circumstances that might prove especially difficult for any athlete. The guidance provided in the "Handling Missed Heats" Recommended Practice should be reviewed as it is applicable to all athletes, regardless of whether or not they have been diagnosed with ADHD. An additional example of a situation that might prove difficult for any athlete, and which is not discussed in that Recommended Practice, is the situation that occurs when the swimmers and timers are at opposite ends of the pool. For example, if a single length event is being started from the "turn-end" of the pool and the timers remain at the finish end, there will not necessarily be anyone at the blocks to confirm the names of the athletes in the heat being called to the blocks. Under such circumstances, the Referee should practice preventative officiating by instructing the Turn Judges, Clerk-of-

Course, or other designated officials to confirm the names of the swimmers. Likewise, if there is any doubt as to whether or not all the appropriate athletes have stepped up, the Referee should confirm this prior to closing the heat. This is particularly important when the meet logistics may contribute an element of confusion behind the blocks.

*The Officials Committee welcomes thoughts, comments, concerns, and experiences with this procedure from the VSI officiating and coaching community.*

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