

BACKSTROKE

Official FINA Technical Committee interpretation on rules SW6.1 & SW 6.4

SW 6.1

The only new rule change in Backstroke is that the toes no longer need to be under the surface of the water at the start.

(Explanation – FINA has removed the sentence ‘the feet, including the toes, shall be under the surface of the water.’ from the rule. Swimmers may now take up a starting position in the backstroke with any part of the feet or toes above the surface of the water, should they so desire.)

When judging the backstroke turn, officials must consider SW 6.2 and SW 6.4 together.

SW 6.2

At the signal for starting and after turning the swimmer shall push off and swim upon his back throughout the race except when executing a turn as set forth in SW 6.4: the normal position on the back can include a role movement of the body up to, but not including 90 degrees from horizontal. The position of the head is not relevant.

SW 6.4

When executing the turn there must be a touch of the wall with some part of the swimmer’s body. During the turn the shoulders may be turned over the vertical to the breast after which a continuous single arm pull or a continuous simultaneous double arm pull may be used to initiate the turn. The swimmer must have returned to the position on the back upon leaving the wall.

Swimmers must swim on the back throughout the race. There is only one exception when a swimmer can be beyond the 90 degree vertical, and that is when they are executing the turn (as above).

At that time the judge should focus on the swimmers hands to see that a turn is ‘initiated’ with a downward motion. If not we are dealing with an ‘extended layout’ infraction. A swimmer is not turning if one or both arms are simply extended in front of him/her or simply at the swimmer’s side.

Other Backstroke turns, such as the so called ‘suicide’ turn, or a ‘saucer’ turn, are both executed while still on the back without the shoulders passing the 90 degrees vertical prior to the touch.

Kicking is acceptable if it is part of the continuous turning action. The swimmer must be observed in total.

Turning from back to breast to far from the wall, and kicking to make up the distance to begin the turn, is illegal.

Kicking as part of the turn is legal.

(Explanation – FINA has removed the sentence ‘Once the body has left the position on the back, and any kick or arm pull must be part of the continuous turning action’ from the rule. There is no change to the intent of the rule. Swimmers, once leaving their position on the back, must initiate their turn immediately with an arm pull. There is still to be no kick or stroke independent of the continuous turning action.)

The official language of FINA is French, yet the official wording of the rules is in English, so it’s not surprising that there can be problems