

Section 203.4 (The School Rule)

Section 203.4 of the *USA Swimming Rules and Regulations* is often called the "school section". Questions are frequently asked about this section. Following is an article written several years ago by Barney Favaro when he was Chair of the Legislation Committee. The article has recently been updated.

Question posed by an LSC:

The Situation: The University registers as a school club with USA Swimming. Their swimmers compete regularly in USA Swimming meets as a school club during the NCAA season. At the conclusion of the NCAA season, they wish to continue to compete in USA Swimming meets as a school club until the end of school and then swim attached for their local swim club during the summer.

The Problem: Section 203.4 states the swimmer may compete during the school swimming season commencement/termination dates as provided by the swimmer. This is vague and we are unsure whether these are the NCAA season dates, collegiate competition schedule dates as posted by the school or the dates the swimmer is enrolled as a student. Also, how does the swimmer verify the commencement/termination date? The school tells us there is no collegiate swimming beyond the NCAA championship. The swimmer and coach tell us that they swim together all year as a school club and are recognized as such. Thus, our problem.

Additional Concern: If a red-shirted swimmer competes with the club in the non-collegiate season, is this also another problem?

Discussion: The key is to try to keep separate and apart the concepts of the University swimming team as a "school team" engaged in school competition and as a "school club" engaged in USA Swimming competition.

Not all "school seasons" are the same for all schools, particularly in the secondary and junior college levels. At the University level, the school swimming season generally coincides with the NCAA season. But in actual fact, the school swimming season is what the coach or swimmer says it is.

Keep in mind that at the end of the "school season" each of the swimmers on the school team may immediately attach to the USA Swimming club of his choice.

1. NCAA season ends. School wishes to compete as school club in USA Swimming competition until end of school term. Can do so, so long as each swimmer is currently eligible to compete for the school in collegiate competition.
2. NCAA season ends. School wishes to compete as school club to end of term but coach brings in outside athletes to swim for the team. Team is then no longer a school club but becomes an independent USA Swimming club, and once having competed in a

USA Swimming meet, each member becomes immediately subject to the 120-day rule.

3. NCAA season ends. School wishes to compete as school club to the end of the school term. Coach decides to use a student swimmer who is academically ineligible for collegiate competition. The team immediately becomes an independent USA Swimming club on its first USA Swimming competition and all team members become immediately subject to the 120-day rule.

4. NCAA season ends. Swimmer "A" is member of school team. Coach decides to swim as school club to end of school term. Swimmer "A" decides he wants to swim for his home USA Swimming club. Can do so immediately. After having represented his home club in a meet, he decides he wants to go back to the school club. Cannot do so, at least without waiting 120 days.

5. Instead of swimming attached to his home club, Swimmer "A" swims unattached in USA Swimming competition under his old coach. Can do so, and, so long as currently eligible for collegiate competition, can go back to school club.

6. NCAA season ends. Coach decides he wants school to swim as school club all year long. Can do so, so long as he uses swimmers currently eligible to swim for his school at all times. Cannot use swimmers whose school eligibility terminated at the end of school term.

7. NCAA season ends. School wishes to compete as school club to end of term. Coach decides to use one of his red-shirted swimmers on team. The red-shirt is "eligible" for collegiate competition, but does he lose his year of school eligibility? The coach has, after all, chosen his "school swimming season". That's for the NCAA and the school officials to decide, and not USA Swimming. It doesn't change the conclusions above.

To Summarize: From the day Swimmer "A" enters school, he can swim for his school in school competition and swim for his school as a USA Swimming club in open USA Swimming competition, during the whole school season without regard to the 120-day rule. He can swim unattached in open USA Swimming competition anywhere he likes during the whole of the school season without regard to the 120-day rule. Once the school season is over, he can swim for any USA Swimming club of his choice without regard to the 120-day rule. But once he begins to play around with swimming for any USA Swimming club, other than his school club, during the school season, he then must comply with the 120-day rule.

The above discussion governs all schools at any level.