

## **Athletes With Disabilities in Artistic Swimming**

The purpose of the AWD program within USAAS is to provide a safe environment in which athletes with disabilities can participate. Artistic swimming is a fun sport that can be beneficial for athletes with physical and cognitive disabilities. Artistic swimming offers health benefits that can positively impact physical strength and balance, improve social skills and mood. The skills learned through artistic swimming can also transcend into other activities and therefore, improve quality of life.

### **Frequently Asked Questions about the AWD program in USAAS**

#### **Why does USAAS need an AWD program?**

USA Artistic Swimming strives to unite, promote and inspire athletes to succeed at all levels of the sport. The AWD program creates an equitable environment and meaningful competitions for athletes with disabilities. The program strives to remove the barriers created by the cognitive and/or physical limitations of athletes and allow for success in artistic swimming. The program wants to provide and an experience in the sport that enhances their life. It is intended to meet an athlete at their level and help them enjoy participation in artistic swimming.

#### **Which athletes are eligible to participate in AWD category?**

USA Artistic Swimming has chosen to maintain a broad definition of an athlete with a disability according to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and will not provide an exhaustive list of medical conditions at this time. A physician may be consulted to identify a medical condition that substantially limits the life activities of a swimmer. USAAS rulebook, provided a definition under technical rule AD 1.2: Artistic Swimming shall define an athlete with a disability as an individual who has a physical or cognitive impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; has a record of such an impairment; or is regarded as having such an impairment. A physical or cognitive impairment is defined as any physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting one or more body systems, such as neurological, musculoskeletal, special sense organs, respiratory (including speech organs), cardiovascular, reproductive, digestive, genitourinary, immune, circulatory, hemic, lymphatic, skin, and endocrine.

#### **How do the athletes and coaches provide proof for enrollment in the AWD program?**

The national office will develop and publish the requirements and necessary medical forms for enrollment in the physical or cognitive category. The coach will be aware of the category of enrollment for the swimmer and be responsible for registration in that category at meets.

#### **How do the athletes register for a meet?**

A separate meet announcement or section of a meet announcement will have instructions for registration and a reference to the Official Club Entry Form that will be used. This form will be

accessed through the USAAS website or sent by the scoring chair. A new form for all meets has been developed and will include AWD routines in the drop down options.

### **What accommodations during a meet will be made for athletes with disability?**

USAAS recommends that all meets for the AWD program provide a pool facility that meets the needs of all athletes with disabilities. Meet hosts have committed to obtaining these facilities and making adjustments to the environment that allows easy access for an athlete with a disability. In order to ensure that specific accommodations can be made the coach MUST complete and return the Accommodations form in the meet announcement according to the guidelines posted. The facility may need time to prepare or adjust, so knowing ahead of the meet will be make it easier for athletes and coaches. All the allowed accommodations could be listed here because the goal is to meet the individual need of each athlete. Accommodations such as maximum time limits for routines, exemption from deck work time limits, assistance on deck or in the water by coaches as penalty exemptions may be found in the Tech Rules AD4 and AD5, specifically. Coaches are allowed on deck for assistance in figures and routines. Meet hosts will attempt to make any necessary accommodations as long as it is communicated ahead of time.

### **Are athletes with disability categorized by age?**

No, the AWD program does not consider age in the registration process. Athletes with disability categories are divided into physical or cognitive categories and tier levels based on their ability.

### **What is the purpose of tier levels and are there designations that correspond to other USAAS figure categories?**

The tier levels are the same for both the cognitive and physical categories. The tier levels are based on figures to provide the coach with a basis of ability to perform artistic swimming skills. The tier levels were designed to provide a variety of figure levels for the athletes that will allow success in learning skills of the sport. Tiers 1-4 do progress in order of difficulty but are not meant to be completed sequentially. It will be the discretion of the coach to determine if the athlete moves to a more challenging tier based on the ability of the athlete to learn and perform the figures. The ability of each individual athlete must be recognized by the coach and progression through the tiers in order is not necessary. An athlete may stay in the same tier their whole career in artistic swimming. Tiers 1-4 do not correspond to the novice, intermediate, age group, junior, senior levels. The tiers may be adjusted in the future once the program is started and the needs of the athletes can be evaluated. Scores from the judges will not depend on tier level, the skills performed at that moment will be judged.

### **How does a coach choose a figure tier level for an athlete with disability?**

A tier level is chosen by the coach based on an assessment of the ability of the athlete to perform figures within the tier. The coach is encouraged to understand the limitations of the athlete so that the best tier level is chosen. The coaches are encouraged to consult parents or other resources to aid in the determination of tier level. Athletes are not required to stay in the same tier level throughout the season or from one year to the next. The coach monitors the progress of the

athlete and determines the tier levels for entry in each meet. If a tier level was too challenging at one meet it can be changed for the next meet.

**Are there required elements for routines in the AWD categories?**

No, only free routines are performed in each category and tier level.

**How does a coach chose a routine tier level for an athlete with disability?**

The tier levels were based on figures so that a baseline skills could be used for routines. Therefore, the program suggests that the tier for the figures and routines should be the same. The following demonstrates how the routine tier would be determined for registration: (see Tech Rule AD 2.1.2 2)

Solo – same tier level for figures and routine

Duet/Mixed duet- If swimmers are both in same figure tier (ie. Tier 1) then the routine tier would be 1. If the swimmers are in different tiers (ie. Tier 1 and Tier 3) then the average would be calculated (and rounded up if necessary) and the routine Tier 2 is where they would compete and given placement for awards.

Trio – If all three swimmers are in same figure tier (ie. Tier 1) then the routine tier would be 1. If the swimmers are in different tiers (ie. Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3) then the average would be calculated and the routine Tier 2 is where they would compete and given placement for awards.

Team - If all swimmers are in same figure tier (ie. Tier 1) then the routine tier would be 1. If the swimmers are in different tiers then the average would be calculated and rounded up to determine the routine tier where they would compete and given placement for awards.

**Can AWD swimmers with cognitive and physical category entries swim in the same routine together?**

Yes, according to tech rule AD 2.1.2 1 Athletes from different disability categories may compete together in Duet, Mixed Duet and Team. Routines that include competitors with a cognitive disability and competitors with a physical disability shall compete in the physical disability category.

**What if my cognitive swimmer is being judged for a figure and they can only perform the first two positions out of 4 positions for that figure. Will they get a zero?**

No, zeroes will not be given in the AWD program. The swimmer may be allowed to perform the figure again if the coach requests it. However, if they are not to complete the figure a score will be given for the portion performed. The judges will score any part performed.

**What if I have swimmer entered in the physical category that is missing a limb and the figure requires performance of both sides of the body (ie. Bent knee, alternate). Will they be given a zero or penalized?**

No, zeroes will not be given in the AWD program. The judge will score the portion or whole figure performed as if the limb was present.

**How are placement and awards given in AWD program?**

Awards will be given for the physical and cognitive category separately. Awards are given for placement in the each figure tier (1-4) as an individual event and will follow guidelines published in the meet announcement. The awards for routines in each tier level will follow the guidelines in the meet announcement and placement will occur according to technical rule AD 5.4 The average Figure score shall be added to the Free routine score to determine the Final score for placement in the category.

**Do AWD swimmers have to pass USAAS levels to enter specific zone or national meets?**

No, all AWD meets are invitational and do not require levels.

**Can my AWD swimmer participate in a meet with non-disabled swimmers?**

Yes, an athlete with disability can be entered in a meet with non-disabled swimmers. However, the accommodations offered in the AWD program will not be given in non-AWD meet. This means that swimmer will have to perform the same requirements of the non-disabled swimmers (figures/elements and LATD level requirements may be applied). Registration would be separate for the two meets.